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ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

Volume IX APRIL 15, 1926 Number 7

CONTENTS

COVER DESIGN.....N. EGGENHOFER.....
WITNESS.....ELIZABETH HERRICK..... 3
Complete Novelette
THE SIDNEY STREET AFFAIR.....DALE COLLINS..... 23
The Fifth PETER LAMB *Story*
SIDE SHOWS AND SHIPS.....JAMES L. FORD..... 31
Short Story
THE MOST MYSTERIOUS HAPPENING IN MY LIFE...LENORE ULRIC..... 40
No. 6 of a series of true mystery stories by famous people of stage and screen as related to BIDE DUDLEY
THE BIG BOOB.....WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE.... 44
Short Story
SINISTER HOUSE.....CHARLES G. BOOTH..... 56
A Four Part Story—Part III
THE GREEN PARROT.....HARRISON J. HOLT..... 100
Short Story
SILK ON A THORN.....H. M. HAMILTON..... 103
Short Story
THE EDGE OF THE AX.....HUNTER STINSON..... 115
Short Story

MISCELLANEOUS

CITIES AND ISLES OF THE BLEST..... 22
LO! THE POOR UNICORN..... 30
RED INDIAN MAGIC..... 39
MINUS THE DRAGON..... 99

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Around the Corner

IF the future were an open book that all who ran might read, there would be no need for faith or hope and still less need for necromancy. Fortunately, life is so ordered that every Tomorrow is a mystery and every "next corner" the gateway to a new adventure. It is just this mystery that has led Man out of the thunder-darkness of the Stone Age into his present more or less agreeably clothed and comfortable state of well-being. And he is still probing the farther mysteries—still turning corners—filled with the same age-old hope that a new mystery will be solved.

This primitive urge is at the very roots of this magazine's existence, and in our next issue—out May 1

Richard Le Gallienne probes one of these "farther mysteries" in a story which he has called "The Girl on the Staircase." That it is a fine thing finely done is rather superfluous comment, since the name and fame of Richard Le Gallienne speak for themselves.

Augustus Thomas, the Dean of American Dramatists, author of such mystery plays as "The Witching Hour" and "The Creaking Chair," tells a true mystery story which is reported by Bide Dudley.

Robert W. Sneddon supplies an unusual tale with the still more unusual title of "Nobody Ever Died In This House."

Victor Lauriston is responsible for an arresting two part story called "No Defense Whatever."

Dale Collins concludes the *Peter Lamb* series with a characteristically clever story characteristically entitled "The Green Eye—and So On."

And Jean Allister sees to it that *Sarah McCloud* keeps a promise by telling the story of "The Red Button."

All of these are mystery stories of the first order. None of them is in the least alike save in the one quality of climax. In other words, the wallop in each is where it belongs.

Witness

By ELIZABETH HERRICK

A Complete Novelette

I

THE chances are that Markham would have given the girl no more than a cursory glance, though she was sitting opposite him, if it hadn't been for the fixed regard of the man on the rear platform of the car. But there was something so sinister in this man's furtive, almost constant watchfulness that Markham's own eyes followed the foreigner's, fascinated.

Wide, unwavering, almost unwinking, the beady black orbs suggested the menace of a snake's, charming its victim before the fatal stroke. Yet whenever the girl, uneasily conscious of the scrutiny, turned a startled head in the man's direction, someone was standing in front of him—or had he, in the fraction of an instant, moved behind someone?

Each time the girl's eyes came back to Markham, at first in frank surprise, then with a touch of hauteur. Evidently she believed him the offender, still, for the life of him, Markham couldn't keep his eyes from the face that so fascinated the Italian.

It was a pretty face, yet not pretty to distraction; rather, a thoughtful, cultivated face with an expression of unusual sweetness and wide hazel eyes that, in their troubled depths, seemed anxiously seeking something. There was a restlessness, too, in the slender body as if a fear harassed, or as if time was too slow to find what she sought.

She wore a clinging crêpe of old-blue, whose fashion discovered the girlishness of her figure. She might have been, perhaps, twenty-three, or the harassment of whatever disturbed her made her look that.

The papers, after the fact, put her age at nineteen, Markham noted.

THERE were two things about her dress that Markham especially noticed, chiefly because the Italian was studying them alertly. One was rather an old-fashioned chain of dull gold about the length of the longest strings of cheap beads women deck themselves with, but in pleasing contrast to them. It was an antique worth, from the size and apparent weight of its links, a fabulous sum.

Markham saw the Italian's eyes quicken on it, and there leaped into his mind instantly a dark alley, a catlike step behind the girl, a sudden blow, and the Italian scudding away into the shadows with the chain in his pocket.

Then suddenly Markham discovered that it wasn't the chain the Italian was looking at but the locket, or was it—horrible and sinister thought—what lay under the locket, for it had slipped as the girl moved, and lay in a fold of her dress just over her heart.

The next minute Markham was giving himself a mental shake for a fool, for the Italian was looking now at the gold-mesh purse that lay on the girl's knees, as if his fingers itched to grasp it.

The fellow was evidently just a plain thief who had spotted the girl for her valuables. And this theory was borne out by the circumstance that, when the girl rang for the car to stop at Calla street, the Italian slid off into the dark while the girl was rising from her seat.

Markham, too, got off behind the girl, with no clearly defined purpose of what he was going to do, but very certain of what the foreigner wasn't going to do.

On the opposite corner of Calla street the Italian was obviously and innocently striking a match against the trolley post to light his cigar.

Markham looked for an officer, but none, of course, was in sight.

As the girl walked down Calla street, the Italian, on the opposite side, walked along it, too, but more briskly. Markham divined the fellow's intention to cross just ahead and intercept the girl between arc-lights beyond Cedar Place.

Markham quickened his step and caught up with the girl. Of course, she would suspect him, as she had suspected him of staring, but it seemed the one thing to do.

"Pardon me," he said, "if I walk along with you. I don't know just what he's up to, but that fellow ahead means you no good."

As Markham had foreseen, the girl was startled and drew away from him quite as if he were the crook.

"Thank you!" she answered him distantly, "but I'm not in the least timid. And it is only a few steps to Madame's."

Markham felt himself redden in the darkness, but he put a good face on the rebuff.

"Very well! Then I'll walk *behind* you to Madame's. I don't know you, to be sure, but I do know that Italian means mischief."

"An Italian?" There was a sudden startle in her voice, very like the tremor of fear, though she wasn't timid.

She stopped short and Markham's forward step — he had fallen back as he spoke—brought him beside her again.

"Is it Joe?"

She gave a nervous little laugh.

"But, of course, you wouldn't know."

WITH a sudden chill at his own heart Markham recalled the locket that had lain over the girl's heart. His first impression was correct. There was more in this than theft, after all.

"If Joe is the one you are afraid of," he said bluntly, "it is Joe. He was watching you from the platform of the car"—he didn't say "as a snake watches a rabbit"—"as a cat watches a mouse."

"Oh!" she gave a slight but very perceptible shudder. "I *knew* it! I felt it! But I thought it was you"; then, womanlike, she added paradoxically, "Yet I knew it couldn't be."

Markham felt pleasantly exonerated.

"I don't know if it's your chain or your purse that he's after," he hazarded. "He was looking at both, or something else."

"It's something else," the girl answered quickly, "but he thinks the purse or the locket might help him to it, because I always have them with me. You see," she took back her confidence with another little nervous laugh, "clever as they are, crooks get a lot of things wrong."

They had reached Cedar Place.

"I go down here," the girl said. "Madame's is the third house on this side, so I am safe now. Thank you so much!"

The Italian had crossed the street ahead of them and was loitering just beyond the radius of the corner arc-light. Markham saw the red ash of

his cigar like a glowing button in the darkness.

"All the same," Markham persisted, "I think I'll go with you to Madame's door. Our foreign gentleman ahead would otherwise accompany you."

"Oh, do you think he would *dare?* There'll be others going to Madame's, too."

However, she made no further objection to Markham's accompanying her, though, as she had said, there were "others going, too."

A little knot of people who seemed to know the girl passed in ahead and Markham made sure, before he lifted his hat and bade her good-night, that there were others behind. Still, in a big apartment house, in the long, lonely corridors, in the elevator-lift, almost anything might happen.

Though he watched her from the entrance safely to the elevator, he was curiously reluctant to leave her there with only "the others" for protection, none of whom might, on leaving, be going her way.

Who knew where she might live or what lonely stretch of walk lay before her—not that Markham was over much worried now about the chain and purse, if that was *all* the fellow wanted—but he recalled, again with that curious chill of foreboding, the sinister eyes.

He felt them on him now in the darkness as he went down the steps, although, when he looked across the street, the fellow was nowhere to be seen.

Markham found his absence someway less reassuring than his presence would have been. He turned on his heel and went back into the house. The girl had said there would be others going to Madame's. Markham decided on the instant to be one of the others.

"Madame" sounded like a musical or a fashion-show. He was unmusical and unmarried, but he felt that he could sit through either function.

It was not until, following the lead of two stout, elderly women who puffed in and out of the elevator, Markham approached Madame's door that he realized he was invitationless, and that complications might ensue. He accosted the woman nearest him.

"I beg pardon! Is the gathering public?"

The woman looked at him blankly. Markham recast his question.

"I mean, can anyone go?"

"Oh! Why, I guess so. We've never come before ourselves."

II

ONE of the women rang and the door opened.

To Markham's surprise, the room beyond it was dark, except for the feeble flare of some four or five candles on the mantel. The dimness favored the unbidden guest and Markham slipped in, unchallenged, in the wake of the women. It struck him, as he did so, what an easy matter it would be for "Joe" to slip in, too. Perhaps he had already done so.

Markham strained his eyes in the dimness and made out that the room was well-filled with people who were listening attentively to a voice which came seemingly from the portieres between this room and a room beyond.

"I'll get it plainer for you, lady, if you want."

"No," the woman on Markham's right spoke in nervous haste. "I—guess I understand."

"I guess you do," the voice said significantly.

And now Markham's eyes, accustomed to the dimness, saw that it came from the lips of a stout woman in black, who sat back under the

portieres in a big side-arm rocker. Her head was leaned against the cretonne pillow of the rocker and her eyes were closed. As she spoke, the eyelids strained back under the eyelashes, as if trying to lift, but her eyes remained closed.

By these signs, Markham discovered that he was in the midst of a seance, and with increased trepidation he looked around for the girl, at first not placing her among the shadowy figures.

The medium turned her head toward the woman who had spoken.

"Lady, there's a question-mark over your head."

"Yes. May I ask the question mentally?"

"I'll try to get it. H'm! It's not just yourself in that question, lady. There are two others. And I want to say to that question, 'Yes' and 'No.' 'No' at first, then 'Yes,' for they are going to consider a long time. But, eventually, 'Yes.' Does that answer your question, lady?"

"Perfectly. Thank you!"

MADAME went on rapidly.

Markham, not a believer in phenomena of the sort, found himself being convinced against his will that this medium, at least, knew what she was talking about. In seven or eight "messages" she made apparently no slip.

Suddenly, she came close, or her voice did, to Markham.

"There's a father here who passed out with paralysis. He is showing his hand, and he can't straighten the fingers. He says it was like that a long time, but he's glad he signed his name first. And I want to go to the lady right down there—yes, you, dear! And I want to ask you if you recognize the gentleman?"

"I certainly do."

The low cultured voice with that disturbing undernote of anxiety or harassment was right at Markham's elbow. By a singular protective providence, it seemed, he had seated himself beside her.

"Do you know what the gentleman means by signing his name first?"

"He means signing his will."

The medium assented

"He says that is right. He didn't want the boy to get more than his share. The boy, Alec, he calls him, had had his share already and spent it in riotous living. What was left—'God forgive him,' he says, 'that it wasn't more'—was for you.

"He is troubled about it still, for he says he should have given it to you outright instead of leaving it in trust. Now, if anything happens to you, Alec will get it after all. And he's worried, too, over something else. Have you some jewels somewhere—I don't mean what you're wearing, lady, but others—put away?"

"Yes."

The girl's voice was just audible, but Markham sensed a tremor in it. It flashed on him intuitively that these were what "Joe" was after—uncut stones.

"I'll tell you what I see."

The medium's right hand was lifted as if to open a door. Then suddenly it dropped and her high, plaintive, rather sweet voice dropped, too. She passed her other hand over her brow in a dazed way.

"Wait a minute!" she muttered. "Something came before the tongue to our sight and broke the vibration. Please play some music and I'll try to get it again."

A man near the phonograph started it. On the second verse of "Face to Face" the medium again held up her hand. The man shut off the phonograph.

"He—the gentleman—doesn't want me to tell you that here. Someone

might hear who shouldn't. 'Joe' might hear. Do you know 'Joe'?"

The girl's violent start communicated itself to Markham.

He felt his own shudder, as if something chill and terrible passed close to him in the air.

"Yes, I know Joe." Her strained voice was a whisper.

"Look out for him!" the medium warned sharply. "The gentleman says, 'Look out for Joe!' I seem to be going down a dark street and there's a man following me, not close, so I can see him, but I feel him lurking behind. But whenever I look around, he is out of sight."

Markham was reminded of the man in the car. Whenever the girl had looked toward the Italian, he *was not there.*

"And I come to a large house set back among trees, with a lot of lilacs and low shrubs around it. And I want to go into the house and see if the jewels are safe. And I open the door——"

Again the medium's right hand lifted in that curious gesture of turning a knob.

She paused ever so slightly.

"Where they are," she went on significantly, "you understand. And I take out the casket and unlock it and see that the jewels are safe. And I want to draw a breath of relief. Then I want to shiver, for I look up and a man is there. And he has something in his hand with which to strike me. Lady, don't you go in alone! Do you understand?"

"Yes. Will they—my brother and Joe—succeed in getting the stones away from me?"

"I don't see them getting them."

The medium was positive.

"You call and someone comes running, a gentleman who has been watching outside. I see a capital 'M' over his head and the next letter is 'a.' There are four or five letters more, but they write them so small I can't read them. Lady, do you know a tall gentleman, a young man, whose name begins with *M?*

"Never mind if you don't," as the girl gave a doubtful negative, "you're going to know him and before twelve o'clock tonight. Lady, look out for yourself! I see a man in your house now—in your room. Hasn't your room a small mahogany desk with two silver candle-sticks on it?"

The girl's assent was more a gasp than a word.

"Well, the man—they give it to me he is a blood-tie, a brother, but, forgive me, lady, I don't like what he's doing. He's going right through your desk, turning things topsy-turvy. He's looking for something."

"But how could he get *in?*" the girl asked her anxiously. "Hannah is there, and she would never let him in."

The medium laughed shortly, without mirth.

"They could put almost anything over on you, couldn't they, lady? My dear, you can *buy* a servant sometimes!"

Again the girl started; then she laughed, in nervous relief.

"But you can't buy a dog!" she triumphed. "And Rex *hates* him!"

THE medium's face changed and darkened.

It looked, to Markham's startled eyes, for an instant like the face of a man, black-browed, swarthy, scowling. The eyelids, strained to lift, almost succeeded.

A glimmer of light shone out under—a flash of sinister triumph. The high, plaintive voice dropped to a menacing undertone, hoarse, throaty and masculine.

"You can kill a dog!" it said into the tense, vibrating silence.

"Oh!" the girl shrank closer to Markham.

Almost without thought he laid a protecting hand across hers.

"He wouldn't kill Rex, Dad's dog!"

The medium's voice was again that of her former "control," high, plaintive, sweet.

"Oh, lady! You don't know much of this world's evil. But that man, your brother, knows enough of it to more than make up. Lady, I'm sorry to tell you this, for I know it hurts you, but I see a knife at the dog's throat. Better the dog than you, lady!" as the girl cried out sharply.

"I had to tell you, though, so you wouldn't go in alone. And don't keep the jewels in the house. Put them in a safe deposit box, your father says. And don't go on living there alone. Get married or get a family in there with you.

"Now, I want to go to the gentleman sitting next, for the light over your head goes over to him. And I want to say that a father and a mother come to him and an uncle George. Uncle George was a Supreme Court Judge. And judges, he says, want justice done. And he says that you are to try to prevent something happening that would certainly happen without you.

"He says there's a lady that needs help, and he wants you to give it. There's someone who wants to get something valuable from her. And he says—now *I* don't know what he means, but he says you've prevented it once tonight, prevent it again!"

"I know! I understand!"

Instinctively again the girl was closer to Markham. His hand over hers tightened in a grasp of assurance.

"Don't be afraid!" he said, low. "We'll out-maneuver him."

"Your uncle says her name is Beatrice," went on the medium. "Do you know Beatrice?"

"I think so," Markham glanced toward the girl.

"You *think* so!" the medium repeated after him. "I want you to *know*. It's very important—how important, you may realize tomorrow. I can make it plainer to you, if you wish, but they give it to me that young lady would rather not."

Again Markham glanced at his seat-mate.

"You needn't," he answered the medium. "I *do* know Beatrice."

"Then look out for her tonight! There's mischief brewing, brewing now. Your uncle George, the judge, says you are not to be afraid to do what he will give you to do, for he will see that justice is done you in the end.

"Now, that's a queer sort of message to give to you, gentleman, but they don't give it to me any plainer. And it seems to be more for somebody else than for yourself. If there's anything you want to know, you may ask a question and we will try to answer it."

"Nothing, thank you!" Markham answered, and the medium left him for another.

THERE were perhaps thirty people in the "circle," but the medium dealt with them rapidly. She was swift and sure.

Markham's mind was groping, like his Uncle George's, through the darkness outside, in hot pursuit of that would-be, doubtless many times *had* been, criminal; found it arrested and dragged back by some startling "message" that compelled an amazed, sometimes reluctant, assent from its recipient.

"I don't know how Madame Tyne gets it," said a pompous business man on the other side of Markham, as they rose together when the se-

ance was over, "but she gets it, no mistake! That quotation on copper was just where the market stood when it closed today. Madame said, 'Buy!' So I shall buy tomorrow, sure as the sun rises. She has never yet made a mistake by a point, for me!"

Then you really believe that the dog is dead?" Markham asked in an undertone. The man, double-wrapped in his own affairs, looked blank.

"The young lady's dog," Markham elucidated.

"Oh—oh—yes! Sure thing! Stuck in the throat! Those Italians are up to everything. Fine family, the Treadwells; all but the boy! Ran through his share of the property and now he is out for his sister's. Well, good-night, sir! Hope I see you again!"

III

MADAME TYNE stood in the doorway, shaking hands with her patrons as they left. By the electric light, which had been switched on, Markham saw a stout, dark-complexioned woman gowned in black lace, with a string of large pearls around her neck. She had a pleasant, wholesome face that irradiated sudden loveliness as Beatrice Treadwell paused in front of her.

"So you did come after all, dear!" she said. "I was afraid you wouldn't. There has been something following me all day, about you. I want you to be careful about something. Did I tell you that in your message?"

"Yes. Oh, Madame!" the girl's voice broke in poignant distress. "*Would* Alec kill Rex? Why, he used to play with him when he was little."

With a peculiar widening of their pupils, Madame's pleasant, brown eyes seemed to dilate and look far; then, as swiftly, they traveled back to the girl's, with a motherly compassion.

"Better the dog than you, my dear!" she said kindly and again pressed the girl's slender palm in both hands. "But I want you to be careful tonight. They say that to me again. Who is this gentleman—a friend of yours?"

The medium turned quickly to Markham and again her eyes went faring.

Under the contact of that deep glance—it seemed to pass like a sword-flash through Markham's own sight into what lay beyond—though not conscious of anything very black in his own past, he felt the instinct to parry.

The next instant the same eyes—yet *were* they the same—were regarding him pleasantly.

"I'm not going to tell you to come again," she smiled, "because I know that you will. Did you get a good message, Mr. Ma—rkham?"

"A peculiar one; not for myself. You told me to take care tonight of a young lady I had never seen before."

Again that swift, rapier-like thrust seemed to let light through darkness.

"Then do it!" said Madame shortly. "I don't like conditions."

She reached in front of him and laid a hand on the girl's arm.

"Good-by, my dear!" she said almost wistfully. "And come to me tomorrow!"

Beatrice looked pleased.

"I'd love to, Madame, if I don't go into the country."

"You wont go into the country!" Madame said with certainty.

BEATRICE passed out of the door, Markham following. A deep-drawn sigh just behind him brought his eyes back to Madame. That very remarkable person, as he had decided

she was, had put her hand suddenly over her heart.

Markham saw someone, a good-looking man, in tortoise-shell spectacles, whom he took for her husband, hand Madame a glass of water.

"What's the matter, Georgie? Don't you feel well?"

Markham heard her answer.

"A pain like a knife. I've taken on someone's condition, I suppose. Did I read for anyone with heart-disease?"

DOWN again in the street, Markham and Beatrice Treadwell walked the length of it in silence. When they turned into Calla street, Markham looked around him carefully. There was no trace of the Italian.

"Not that I really expected to see him," he explained cheerfully. "He's gone on ahead of us."

"Do you really think so?" the girl's voice apprehended.

"Don't you? He's reckoning on my walking back with you to the car. But he's reckoning wrong. I'm going back with you *in* the car."

"Oh, *should* you?"

Her voice, at once relieved and embarrassed, suggested conventions. She had never met him before!

"In danger, we have to brush aside Mother Grundy with her lorgnette and furbelows," he answered facetiously. "You know Madame told me to look after you tonight. Madame is a good medium, isn't she?"

"Wonderful!" said the girl with conviction. "I've been going to her now for two years and she hasn't made one mistake."

Then her voice drooped and wavered.

"*Do* you believe Rex is dead?"

Her eyes, lifted to his, the piteous quiver in her voice begged for a negative.

Markham avoided the question.

"I wouldn't put it past that man 'Joe,' but it doesn't seem as if your brother, bad as he is, would countenance the killing of an old playmate."

The girl walked along soberly. They reached the corner and stood awaiting a car.

"I don't know! He played with me, too, yet I sometimes think he would kill me, if *he* thought he could get the jewels by doing so."

"You should tell the police. You need protection."

"He is my brother!" the girl reminded him.

In the car it occurred to Markham that he didn't know where they were going.

"It sounds absurd," he told her, "to have to ask where you live."

She answered more brightly:

"In one of the flowery by-paths for which the Park district is noted —Lilac Road. It is five blocks down. Our place used to be the whole street, but it has been cut up into building lots. The next streets are Weigelia Terrace and Magnolia Square, and a cross-street is Daffodil Court. It doesn't take much longer to go than to tell it. The next stop is ours."

Markham got off first. As he turned to help Beatrice, he saw the glowing button of a cigar-end in the darkness at the foot of the post on the corner. He looked sharply down the long shadow the post threw on a neighboring lawn as he walked down the street beside Beatrice.

At the far end the shadow lost itself in the broader shadow of shrubbery. With his peculiar faculty of disappearance at will, the Italian had doubtless, Markham reflected, lost himself there, too.

The Treadwell house stood halfway down the street, a large old-fashioned mansion of towers and balconies. It was set back in a two-acre lawn where massed shrubbery

and groups of trees afforded a hundred lurking-places.

"I should think you would find it lonely here," Markham commented as they walked up the drive.

"I would, if it weren't home," the girl answered simply. "But I could walk around here blindfold and not lose my bearings."

"Don't try it at night," Markham counseled.

She laughed, but a bit nervously.

"I wont, without Rex! Why, where *is* Rex? Usually he hears me coming away down the street and comes bounding to meet me. He's a very old dog, but you should see him tear down the drive. Oh, you *don't* think anything has happened to him?"

"Perhaps your maid heard something that frightened her and coaxed him into the house for protection," Markham suggested.

Beatrice seemed only half relieved. Deep in her heart, Markham felt, the conviction that made his own heavy was gathering weight.

A wide, almost square porch shaded the front entrance. On either side of it long windows opened out on a balcony with a wrought-iron balustrade. Its delicate, dark tracery of grapes and leaves was thrown in shadow-relief on the gray stone walls. As they mounted the steps the girl uttered a relieved exclamation.

"Oh, here is Rex! Asleep on the doormat. He's such an old dog!" she apologized. "And it has been a hot day. Dear old Rex! Did he get so tired he couldn't wait up for Missy?"

She went down on her knees to pet the animal. The next moment she started, with a cry of horror.

"Why, he's *cold!* And there's something *wet*. Oh, Mr. Markham!"

MARKHAM felt for the torch in his pocket and flashed it on the porch. The dog lay stretched on the mat in front of the door, a dark pool under his head.

The girl was sobbing openly, distressfully. Markham turned to her kindly. This was an old friend—almost, he sensed, her *one* friend—and—well, he liked dogs, himself.

"Better the dog than you!" he repeated the medium. "Madame was right. Someone has been here before us. I think we had better get in. Shall I ring? Or have you a key?"

Beatrice produced a key and Markham unlocked the door. The hall, a wide room the length of the house, was lighted. As they entered, a door away down it opened, apparently from the kitchen, and a woman appeared.

"So you've come home, Miss Bee!" she hailed querulously. "I thought sure something had happened to you."

She was a thin, gaunt woman, harsh-featured, thin-lipped, shifty-eyed. At first glance Markham suspected her. At the sound of her voice he suspected her more. A sort of exasperated disappointment lurked under it.

If something *had* happened, Markham mentally commentated, Hannah wouldn't have been sorry. She caught sight of him then. The disappointment and exasperation increased.

"Well, I never!" she said. "Traipsing around with a strange man this time o' night. Sure as you're born, you'll get your throat cut one of these days."

"That is precisely the reason I came home with Miss Treadwell," Markham cut in shortly, "to prevent her throat being cut, like the dog's!"

He was watching the woman narrowly and remarked the sudden blink of her eyes as if surprised by a strong light. *She knew about the dog.* And she knew that he knew!

"The dog? That's what he was yelping about, then. There was a car run like Jehu down the street and Rex jumping and yelping around it. It must have hit him, I guess."

It was plausible. The only trouble with Hannah's story was that it wasn't true. Beatrice, though, caught at it.

"That must have been it. Oh, poor Rex! Can't we bring him in and see?"

Hannah demurred.

"I don't want any blood on my rugs," she objected. "If the dog's dead, he's dead and best left outside."

It was clear that the woman dominated her mistress. Beatrice hesitated.

"If he was picked up by an automobile there wouldn't be any blood," Markham said to her, ignoring the servant. "I've seen animals hit scores of times with not a mark on them."

Her eyes widened. They looked frightened.

"But there was blood," she said. "I felt it on his neck. And when you flashed the torch, I—I *saw* it."

"Yes." Markham nodded gravely. "But, if you like, I'll bring him in."

Her eyes thanked him.

"If you would! I don't like to leave him outside. He—he always came in with me!"

She broke down then and turned her back on him abruptly, going to the fireplace and leaning her head against the mantel. Hannah went back into the kitchen, banging the door.

With an instinct that Beatrice would rather be left to herself for a minute, Markham went out on the porch. He did not bring the dog in at once, but stood in the heavy shadow of the porch and surveyed the grounds.

Somewhere out there in the shadow or close by in the shrubbery that encircled the house was the murderer, plotting his robbery or, more horrible, another murder.

There was a particular spot that held Markham's attention. Near the corner of the house was a mass-planting of azaleas and rhododendrons in the shelter of two or three fine old trees.

Whether because he really saw something move—something darker than the shrubbery—or only sensed something human in the luxuriant plant growth, he left the porch and walking softly close to the house wall, approached the spot.

But, as he passed the balcony on that side, he heard a woman's scream from within the house, in anger or in terror, then, more distinctly—words.

"Help! Mr. Markham! Help! Quick!"

IV

THERE was no doubt about it. It was Beatrice's voice right above him there in the room behind the balcony where, suddenly, a light flared. He saw her for a second. She had run to the window and was tugging at the long sash to lift it. She had it half up when a man's hand flung her violently back from the window and jammed down the sash.

There was another scream, this time of horror and dread unspeakable. The light went out. Silence.

At the first outcry Markham had run back to the door. Either it had a spring lock or it had been deliberately locked after him. He ran to the balcony, swung himself over the balustrade and flung up the sash.

Expecting attack, he flashed his torch around the room as he entered.

It revealed nothing at first but some massive mahogany. The strug-

gling figures had both, apparently, vanished.

He found the switch and, as the room flooded with light from a great cut-glass chandelier, he discovered what had at first escaped him—so near was her dress to the color of the Bokhara rug in front of the fireplace.

Beatrice lay crumpled on her side, her head against one of the heavy brass andirons.

Markham's first thought was that the blow on her head — she must have struck the andiron in falling, when her assailant flung her back from the window—had merely stunned her. But as he stooped to gently lift her head and shoulders, the chain around her neck slipped with the movement and the locket, striking his hand, left a wet mark—a wet, red mark.

With a start of horror he saw that there was a wet mark, too, on her dress where the locket had lain, a little over the left side—a wet red stain that, as his eyes rested on it, spread slowly.

HE laid her head back on the rug and looked for a telephone. By a miracle there was one on a desk near the door. There was no time to get her doctor's number from Hannah.

Every second would count with that ebbing red pulse. He called his own doctor. By another miracle his doctor was in and would "be there in three minutes."

As Markham hung up, he heard the patter of running, felt-slippered feet, in the hall. The next minute Hannah was on him, a kimono over her nightdress, her gray hair streaming.

"Help! Murder! Help!" she was shouting hysterically.

And she beat at him with both hands when he tried to reassure her.

"Be quiet!" he bade sharply. "I don't think it's murder yet. Miss Treadwell is still breathing. But she's badly hurt, evidently. Try to keep your head and bring me some water."

But one might as well talk to the wind.

She was still clinging to him and screaming when the doctor ran up the steps. Markham had to shake her from him to let in the physician. She followed him into the hall, and burst out afresh at sight of the doctor.

"God forgive me! Why did I ever go to bed and leave Miss Bee alone with him? He's murdered her like I told her somebody would, the black-hearted villain!"

"Nonsense!" Doctor Hazen interrupted her sharply. "I know this young man. Now, Ned, what's up, anyway?"

MARKHAM told his story while the doctor opened the girl's dress and examined her wound. A stab over the heart, certainly, but the heart was still beating; feebly, perhaps, but beating. Yes, the blow had grazed the heart, puncturing its muscular wall, but, if the leak could be stopped in *time*——

"It'll run a good while yet, like a punctured tire," the doctor said cheerfully, as he rose from dressing the wound. But *could* the leak be stopped? Ah, that was the question! It was also the question who did it, anyway.

"*He* did. The black, murdering villain!" Hannah's accusing finger again menaced Markham's face.

"Nonsense!" the doctor repeated, but his kindly face looked worried. "Didn't you hear Mr. Markham say he went out after the dog and while he was outside he heard your mistress calling for help? The probability is that whoever killed the dog tried to kill the woman."

Hannah stuck to her guns, one eye, though, on Markham. An auto had struck the dog. No, she didn't

see it, but she heard it. She heard the auto, and then the dog yelp.

"We'll soon see as to that," said the doctor. "I'll have a look at him while I'm waiting for the ambulance."

At that, Hannah broke out again—were they going to take Miss Bee away from her, the darling? Why, she'd nurse her like her own mother!

"It's a hospital case," the doctor answered her shortly.

When they were outside, bending over the dog, he looked up at Markham.

"I don't like the looks of that woman. She's not developed mentally. I wouldn't put any inhuman deed past her. She's entirely abnormal!"

As Markham suspected, there were the marks of a knife on the dog's throat. He had been struck twice, the second blow severing the artery.

"Chances are the same knife made the cut on the girl! But if the woman did it, she had the inside track by charging it to you. I'll call the police and tell them your story and you can count on me to say and do all I can. But I'm afraid, my boy, you are going to have an unpleasant experience. You are certain to be suspected.

"Of course, I believe your medium told what you say. But can you make the police believe it? They *wont* believe it, though they'll probably arrest her as accessory before the fact.

Uneasily, Markham recalled the medium's face as it had changed when she described the killing of the dog—sneering, sinister, the face of an evil man.

"Perhaps she *is* an accessory of Joe's!" he suggested.

The doctor, being a bit of a psychiatrist, whistled over it thoughtfully, but the criminal-wise inspector, a half-hour afterward, dismissed it as "gammon."

"We'll get the lady, though, for fortune-telling," he promised, with satisfaction. "Rather stout, dark lady, isn't she? Black hair and eyes?"

V

ELATED with the idea of bagging two birds at once, the inspector wished Markham and the doctor a cordial good-evening.

Ten minutes after midnight Markham found himself under arrest for attempted murder and held without bail.

The attorney he called to his defence was a cousin, the son of the judge the medium had brought to him the night before.

Gerald Trumbull put a finger at once on the weak point of Markham's defence.

"Can you get the medium to tell her story? If she does, she's liable to arrest for fortune-telling. If she doesn't, you're liable to go to the chair, in the event the young woman dies.

"She hasn't recovered conscience and the Brace Memorial reports her chance half a point above zero, which isn't encouraging. I'll see your medium right away, but the probability is that she'll keep her own counsel."

The lawyer saw her and found a very reticent, thoroughly alarmed medium. She remembered seeing both the chief actors in last night's tragedy at her "circle," but she didn't remember what she told them.

She never knew afterward what she said "under control." She had known in a general way that something threatened the girl. She hadn't known what it was, but she had begged Miss Treadwell, as a friend, to "be careful."

Who else was at the circle? A stranger, himself, Markham, didn't know. It was useless, the lawyer contended, to ask the medium. She "wouldn't remember," because their testimony, more than her own, would put her in the law's clutches.

"We'll summon her, though. The fact that you were really at her circle will prove part of your story. And I may get more out of her on direct examination."

Gerald Trumbull's tone, though, was gloomy; and the future, to Markham's eyes, as he faced it from his cell bench, gloomier still.

He was tortured by an obsession of the medium's complicity. Over and over again before his mental vision her face was transfigured to that of an evil man. Over and over again he saw her put her hand over her heart, with that gesture significant of Joe's stare at the locket.

Steps approached in the corridor and paused outside his door.

"A visitor to see you, Mr. Markham," said a turnkey.

MARKHAM lifted his haggard face from his hands. Madame Tyne, her own face almost as haggard, stood gripping the iron bars with both hands, a world of distress in her kindly brown eyes. As they met the unexpected hostility of Markham's, they lit with horrified illumination.

"Oh, not *that!*" She seemed to shrink from his thought. "Not that! I wanted to save her. I was trying to save her. And I want to save you. That's why I've come."

Markham laughed skeptically. She wanted to save him, when she had precipitated him into this horror. A likely story. However, he would give her the chance.

"You are going to testify, Madame Tyne?"

She looked more than distressed. Her eyes roved around the cell as if searching a way of escape for herself as well as for him.

"I'll be arrested if I do," she murmured. "I mustn't be arrested—for Rob's sake and the children's!"

"I'll probably go to the chair if you don't," he reminded her grimly. "Remember, Madame, I'm an innocent man."

She looked down on the floor, her large mouth suddenly tremulous.

"I know. I know," she murmured. "Oh, give me strength! Give me strength!"

She was not talking to him, Markham knew, but to the spirit world, in which she believed.

Even in the acute distress of his own situation, Markham found himself wondering at the sudden firmness that tightened her lips and steadied the roving eyes. They met his now steadfastly, then seemed to pass out beyond.

She closed them a minute. When she opened them, they had gone far indeed — beyond Markham, beyond the cell wall behind him, out into that free world Markham feared he was never again to see, and still further beyond.

"Come over here to the door," she bade in that certain voice of the seer.

Markham obeyed her. She began to speak rapidly.

"I want to say, 'Don't be afraid!' Your uncle, the judge, says again, 'Justice shall be done.' But he says you are not to take the stand in your own defence. You and your lawyer have thought of it, but you are not to do it. You are to trust to the instrument and to the spirit world. Do you understand?"

Again suspicion of her darkened Markham's harassed mind. If the medium were really an accomplice of Joe's, wouldn't she plan just this—to keep him from testifying?

Again those far eyes of hers, delving deep, read the thought.

"You are not to distrust the instrument," said the voice—not Madame Tyne's, but a man's, though it seemed to come from her lips — a slow, cultured voice that measured its words carefully and gave each its

due value, a voice vaguely familiar to Markham, like a well-known voice in a dream.

"She is jeopardizing herself for you, Ned. Trust her and tell Gerry to trust her."

In a flash Markham recognized the voice. The nicknames were his uncle's for Gerald and himself.

Suspicion passed like the wind from his mind. He turned to the medium eagerly.

"You are going to testify, to tell what you said to me at the circle?"

"The instrument will tell what is necessary," came in the same voice from the medium's lips.

Then it went into silence. The medium passed a rather dazed hand over her eyes once or twice, closed them and opened them.

"I don't know what I've been saying," she told Markham, "but I feel it's all right. Anyhow, don't worry! I hope they make you comfortable here."

She threw a doubtful glance at the bench where a woolen blanket lay folded.

"And give you enough to eat. I'm roasting chickens Sunday, and I'm going to send you one of them. I want to hear that you've eaten it all —except the bones! They'll let me do that, wont they?"

She appealed to the turnkey as he approached.

"Yes, madame, but it will have to be inspected before it reaches the prisoner."

"My chickens will *bear* inspection," Madame said jovially and, reaching a hand through the bars, shook Markham's warmly. "Good-by and bear up!" she told him. "I feel better now myself."

Then her voice turned significant, though, to the turnkey, it uttered only a metaphor:

"The American flag is over your head, Mr. Markham, and the American flag means victory and freedom!"

And again, with that singular illumination, her eyes, widely dilated, blazed into his—not Madame Tyne's own pleasant rather motherly brown eyes, but the omniscient eyes of the seer.

She came again the day after her chicken, and was rejoiced that he had left only bones. He was in better spirits himself, but she seemed to have absorbed his former depression.

"I have told your lawyer—he's a blood-tie, isn't he?—that I'll tell what I know. But I'm frightened. I don't know what I can say without getting myself in wrong, but maybe it will be given me.

"Your uncle says I'm to be taken care of, and your cousin says so, too, though I don't trust *him* much. He'd wring my neck like that chicken's"—she glanced at the bones on the plate —"to save yours, but it is different with your uncle. His word really counts. I wouldn't dare not to testify when my guides tell me to do it. I don't know, though, what I shall say."

And the morning of the trial found her equally at sea, a thoroughly distressed, pitifully frightened woman, in terror of the law herself, yet still more in fear of seeing an innocent man convicted.

"I wouldn't care so much for myself," she told Gerald Trumbull during the preliminary talk in his office. "It's my husband and the children. I don't want to disgrace them. No," she opposed a warning hand as he started to speak, "don't tell me what I'm to say. I can only say what they give me. You've got to trust me and the spirit world."

"Trust nothing!" said the defence lawyer angrily. "Do you think I'll call you as a witness without the least idea of what you are going to testify?"

"Very well! Very well!" the me-

dium's slow, measured utterance was almost august.

"She rose heavily from her chair.

"Conduct the case your own way, Gerald Trumbull, and lose it and your cousin's life! I wash my hands of it absolutely."

With a vague uneasiness the lawyer recalled his father, the old judge, saying the same thing in a case when first he had taken his son into partnership, many years ago. Gerald had conducted that case his own way and lost it. But how could this medium know?

As he sat down staring at her, she put a hand over her heart and breathed strenuously.

"Oh!" she said, as in pain. "I get a passing-out condition. That poor child is failing."

Trumbull turned to the telephone and called the Memorial hospital. When he jammed the receiver back on its hook, his face had gone white.

"You score!" he said. "Sinking fast! They give her three hours. What the devil are you, anyway?"

VI

IN the beginning of the case the prosecution had it all its own way. Its star witness, Hannah, was called first.

She swore to having seen a strange man, the prisoner, come in with her mistress; to having heard her mistress thank him for something and bid him goodnight.

He had gone out and she, Hannah, had locked the door after him and gone upstairs to bed. In about ten minutes she had heard voices again, very loud and angry, her mistress's and a man's, then the sound of a struggle, a cry and a fall.

Rushing downstairs in her nightdress, she had found her mistress dead, or as "good as dead" on the floor, the window wide open to the balcony and this same strange young man calmly seated at the telephone, calling, not the young lady's doctor, but *his own doctor*, if you please.

The judge was attentive and impressed, the prosecuting attorney triumphant, the jury convinced. Markham braced himself in his chair as if against the death-dealing volt. The only witness he relied on, good old Doctor Hazen, was discredited before he was called.

The prosecution called him at once, while the prejudice Hannah had inspired was fresh in all minds. Doctor Hazen repeated Markham's story of the tragedy and expressed and warmly reiterated his belief in Markham's innocence.

He had known the boy all his life and bore willing—too willing to be legally valuable — testimony to his good character. Under the skillful handling of the prosecution he admitted as unwillingly as his former testimony had been willing, the violent accusation Hannah had hurled at Markham. Altogether, his well-intentioned testimony did Markham a little more harm by establishing, in part, at least, Hannah's veracity. When Doctor Hazen left the stand, Markham felt like one already dead.

Not even the medium granting that she corroborated his story to the doctor could counteract that finger-pointing testimony.

But as Markham's spirit depressed, his cousin's seemed to go higher. The fighting blood of the old judge was in his veins. He held just one card and, when the prosecution rested its case, he laid that one card on the table with an air of triumph. He called Georgia Tyne.

"I'm trusting you absolutely, Madame," he said, as he bent over her chair for an instant.

"Don't trust *me;* trust the spirit world," she told him and again in her eyes and voice was the mysteri-

ous something that reminded him of his father.

ONCE on the stand, however, Madame Tyne appeared frightened.

She swallowed twice as she stated her name and age and swore to tell the whole truth. She swallowed again as she answered the question as to her occupation and her eyes swept appealingly back to the end of the courtroom where the man who had called her "Georgie" at the circle was sitting, with a very pretty young girl beside him. Both smiled encouragingly.

Seemingly strengthened by this support from her own, she admitted, with more ease, that she held "circles," so-called, at her house Friday evenings.

Interrogated by his honor as to what a circle might be, she explained, to the contemptuous amusement of the prosecution, that it was a gathering where "messages" came to her patrons from friends who had "passed on."

"And on Friday, August 7th, the defendant, Edwin Markham, was present at your 'circle'?"

"Yes."

"Did he come alone?"

"I don't know. I was reading for someone when he came in."

"But you know he was there?"

"Yes, I saw him after the circle."

Doctor Hazen's testimony was then read to the court and the medium asked if it was substantially what she had told Markham in his 'message.' Markham threw her an agonized glance of appeal, but she seemed to avoid it.

"I can't tell. I never know what I say under control."

MARKHAM'S head sagged. The prosecuting attorney looked triumphant. His cousin's trump card had been very low in the pack. But the blood of the old judge kept up the fight.

"You talked with Mr. Markham after the seance?"

"Yes."

"What did you say?"

"I asked him if he got a good message."

"What did he reply?"

"A peculiar one! He said that I told him to protect a lady he had never seen before."

Sensation in court. The judge, who had been absently tracing lines on a paper before him, looked up alertly.

"What did you say to that?"

"I said, 'Then do it! I don't like conditions.' I don't know just what I meant, but I sensed something unusual around Miss Treadwell—something that threatened."

"That was all you said?"

"All I *said*—yes."

Something peculiar in the emphasis on the verb struck Gerald Trumbull. It had been a maxim of the judge, his father, "If a witness throws you a line, haul it in!"

He hauled it in, promptly.

"All you said, but not all you did. Will you please tell the court what you did?"

The medium's face changed, ever so slightly. As Markham looked a tremor seemed to pass over it. A slight tremor, too, seized her left hand. Its fingers twitched as if nervously, wringing the gray linen handkerchief between them. Then the fingers were still. She was looking far before her as at a picture hung against the wall of the courtroom.

"I followed them."

MARKHAM'S d e e p-d r a w n breath sounded like a blast in his own ears. She was lying to save him, but—the lie convinced. Everyone in the courtroom and the judge on the bench sat tensely forward.

Trumbull gathered himself quickly,

his mind leaping along ahead of her testimony into the mystery.

"You followed them? Why?"

"Because I was uneasy. I feared Alec would harm her."

At the prosecuting attorney's table a tall young man with a weak, nervous face said something in an agitated whisper to Mr. Stevens, who jumped to his feet with an objection that the judge overruled.

"Wasn't Miss Treadwell on good terms with Alec, her brother?"

"No. There was a dispute over property. She had a fine collection of jewels that he wanted."

"How do you know this?"

"I have heard Miss Treadwell say so."

"You say that you followed them. Immediately?"

"Yes. I went directly after them to the street."

"What car did they take?"

"The White Avenue car. I took the same car."

"Did they see you on the car?"

"No. They were talking together. I was behind them."

"Did they appear to see you when you got off?"

"No. It was a one-man car. They got off in front."

"Where were they when you got off?"

"A little way down Lilac Road."

"But near enough for you to see them distinctly?"

"Yes."

"They went into the Treadwell house together?"

"Yes."

"Where were you then?"

"On the drive."

"Will you please tell the court what happened next?"

The tall young man leaned over to Mr. Stevens and laid a shaking forefinger on the attorney's arm.

"She lies!" he said in a hoarse whisper. "There wasn't anybody there."

The attorney gave him a curious glance, in which something seemed to wake suddenly, and contemptuously shook off his fingers.

"I advise *you* to shut up, Treadwell."

VII

MADAME TYNE went on quietly, in a slow, measured voice that seemed to weigh each word carefully.

"Then, after a brief interval—I should say perhaps ten minutes elapsed—Mr. Markham came from the house and stooped over the dead dog on the rug, patting its head. He walked down the drive a few steps, then paused, as if considering something, and looked sharply in the direction of a mass of shrubbery at the corner of the house. After a minute he walked toward it. As he passed under the balcony window, a light flashed in the room inside. I heard Beatrice scream:

"'Help! Mr. Markham! Help! Quick!' A man's hand caught and threw her back from the window and banged down the sash. There was a second scream, then a crash, as if something fell. The light went out. Mr. Markham ran back to the balcony, swung himself over the balustrade and broke into the room. The light went on. I saw him cross the room and kneel over something on the floor near the fireplace."

"What did you do then?"

"I followed the other man."

Excitement in court.

"The other man?"

"Yes, the man hiding in the shrubbery. When the prisoner broke into the room, the man slinking behind the rhododendrons jumped up and ran across the lawn toward the street."

"Could you see him distinctly?"

"Not at first. He was running, and he kept in the shadow of the trees. When he reached the street, he stopped running and I saw him distinctly.

He was stout and dark. I judged him to be an Italian. A few paces beyond the arc-light on the corner he was joined by another man, who had been running, too—a younger man, more slender man, who called him 'Joe'."

Again Treadwell's agitated fingers clutched the prosecuting attorney's arm.

"You damn fool!" he croaked hoarsely. "What are you letting her talk for? Don't you see she's lying?"

AGAIN the attorney gave him that curious, penetrating glance and shook off his hand like something loathsome.

The medium went on uninterrupted. In the tense stillness of the courtroom each carefully measured word bore the hall-mark of truth.

"The young man gave the short, dark man, Joe, something that glittered.

"'Here!' he said, 'take your damned knife! I struck my sister with it and I think I've killed her. I didn't mean to do it, but she wouldn't tell me where she'd hid them and I heard that fellow coming.'"

Treadwell's chair overturned with a crash. In his mad dash to the door a dozen hands reached out to restrain him, but he broke through them into the corridor.

The courtroom was in an uproar. Hysterical women were laughing and crying. Markham and his attorney were wringing each other's hands. The medium's far gaze wavered. She looked around her with the frightened gaze of a child in unwonted surroundings. The judge was pounding for order.

"The case of the Commonwealth against Edwin Markham is dismissed."

But with everybody else rising and going, Madame Tyne continued to sit in the witness chair, a little dazed, a bit uncertain, like one who has stepped from a swift-going vehicle into the street.

She stretched a hand before her as if reaching for something.

Markham escaped from his cousin-attorney and shook her hand warmly.

"Madame!" he said, his voice broken with emotion, "I'm indebted to you for life. It is idle to talk of return, but if ever there's anything that I can do for you——"

Madame Tyne interrupted him.

"There is," she said cheerfully, "right now, Mr. Markham. Please get me a glass of water. I'm famished for a drink. I'm always thirsty," she apologized to the attorney, who had followed his client, "after I've been working."

EVEN then Gerald Trumbull didn't sense it. While she was drinking the water Markham brought her, the attorney bent over her in warm congratulations.

"You're a star witness," he said, "the best I ever put on the stand. But to think you had all that up your sleeve and never let me suspect. I'd have slept like a baby last night if I had known what you knew."

Madame Tyne looked blank for a minute.

"*I* knew?" she repeated, then her face broke into radiance. "Go home and sleep *now!*" she said, patting Trumbull motherly on the shoulder, "and remember, every minute of our lives the spirit world is looking after us!"

The prosecuting attorney, too, came up to shake hands.

"A very good witness," he congratulated. "Now that I may speak my own mind, I had suspicions of the boy from the outset, but I was obliged to fight the case as it came into my hands. However, I am personally glad that it came out as it did. Thank you for your aid in liberating an in-

nocent man and probably sending a guilty one to the chair, not but what Alec is more weak than wicked.

"He hardly meant to kill his sister. Mentally he's not strong enough to premeditate murder. He struck on mere animal instinct when he heard Mr. Markham returning, and it was his bad luck—he was always a loser—to inflict a fatal blow!"

Markham shuddered. The crumpled figure on the rug, with its white, upturned face, rose like a ghost before him. His fingers twitched.

"It's perhaps unsafe," he said to the attorney, "for a man just acquitted of assault with the intent to kill to say if your men let that scoundrel slip out of their hands, I'll be here again charged with first-degree murder. You say he is more weak than wicked. My God! You should have seen that wicked shadow on the curtain flinging the girl back.

"You should have found her as I found her, all crumpled up on the floor; her beautiful face so still, the fear of him frozen on it to take into the silence with her, the blood on her dress—her breast." Markham drew a hand over his eyes, over his dripping brow.

"You wont believe me, but I'd rather have gone to the chair myself than have to think of her all the rest of my life—and it'll perhaps be years—dead so terribly. And she was so alive, so tense, so vibrant! A beautiful girl, with all the youth and happiness harried out of her by that born criminal you call weaker than wicked."

The prosecutor shrugged.

"You're unstrung, Mr. Markham. And it is no wonder. You've borne up wonderfully under an agonizing strain. Go home and rest; cool down! The law will take care of the boy! It's very regrettable, certainly a horrible thing to have happened, but, Mr. Markham, it happens daily somewhere in the world.

"Be thankful that you're free and that the victim, charming as she doubtless is, or was, is nothing to you, neither sister nor sweetheart, *is* she?" he added, *sotto voce*, to Trumbull.

Markham wheeled suddenly away from them and faced the window to hide the blinding tears that smarted in his eyes.

Nothing to him? Living or dead, she was *everything* to him! God help him, that he had only found her too late!

WITH a common instinct the two counsels moved apart, and bowing to Madame, left the courtroom together. Madame put a motherly arm across Markham's shoulders.

"My boy," she said, "don't take it so hard! There's a little hope yet. I get her name, Beatrice, written right over your head, but there's no light with it. If she were in spirit, there'd come a light with the name. And now I see that the name is hanging over you by a gold thread, and that thread is strengthening, ever so little, minute by minute. Let's go home, child, and ask God to let life flow back into her over it."

VIII

IT was several weeks later that the thread Madame had seen was strong enough to make life a certainty. Markham and Madame Tyne, making their daily call with flowers at the hospital, were told they might see her as they were her "nearest relatives."

"Nearer than relatives!" Madame said grimly to the smiling nurse.

"Oh, I know! I read all about it." The nurse regarded Madame with awed eyes. "You were just *wonderful*. Everybody is talking about you. I'm coming up to one of your 'circles' when I get off this case."

"Will she get well?" Markham asked, his voice hushed between white lips, his eyes anxiously seeking.

"Oh, sure!" the nurse answered, with eager sympathy in the romance. "She's practically out of danger now, only she mustn't be excited, of course, or move at all till the wound wholly heals."

They were in Beatrice's room now. The nurse bent over the bed solicitously.

"Miss Treadwell, I've brought your friends, and they may stay just ten minutes. But you must let them do the talking. You just listen and—yes, you may smile!"

The nurse whisked out of the room, leaving the door slightly ajar. Markham didn't wait for Madame. In a stride he was at the bedside. Bending over, he kissed the white, exquisite face on the pillow, at rest now, without the harassment of fear. For was not fear gone forever with that touch on her lips?

"You *saved* me," she whispered—for whispering isn't talking—"almost with your *life!* The nurse just told me."

But Markham had to disclaim.

"It wasn't I," he said humbly and turned to Madame. "It was Madame's wonderful testimony," though, even now, he couldn't believe it himself.

The girl slipped one hand from Markham's and reached it out to Madame, a frail little hand, wavering over the counterpane.

"*He* saved *me*," she persisted, with a winsome smile that brought girlishness back to her face, but it was *you* who saved us *both*. You were wonderful to follow us. I don't see how you ever thought of it."

"*I* follow you?"

Again Madame looked blank; then once more her eyes lighted and she patted the hand she held softly.

"Hear the child!" she said, like one vastly amused. "It wasn't *I* who followed you. It was Edwin's uncle, the judge. I was only the tongue to his sight!"

Cities and Isles of the Blest

Deep rooted in the heart of all mankind is the yearning for a Paradise and not always a celestial one.

From time immemorial man has felt that somewhere on earth is a corner of such transcendant beauty and serenity that cannot be described in mortal language—the Fortunate Isles of the Greeks and Romans, abode of Heroes, King Arthur's Avalon, the Spanish Isle of Seven Cities, the Buddhist Isle of the Sages, the desirable isles of China and Japan, the Irish O'Brasile, the island sought in dreams by those of every race, color and degree of civilization—where all wishes are fulfilled, and every sense satisfied.

And there are cities, too, where custom and time have not changed the peaceful, harmonious and soul satisfying life of the Golden Age, where all are beautiful, wise and happy. Memories of lost Eden linger in the world consciousness.

Each of us seeks something to which many cannot give a name, and until it is given to us to learn further, we set sail from the ports of Ambition, Adventure, and Mystery toward luring lands that lie just beyond the horizon.

The Sidney Street Affair

By DALE COLLINS

The fifth of a series of short stories retailing the startling adventures of PETER LAMB.

LITTLE MR. LAMB did not allow the fact that the Armenian hotel-keeper had raised the tariff to him to prejudice him against Menang. The experience was too usual to be of any significance. Mr. Lamb accepted it meekly, and pottered about sight-seeing, listening and arousing some interest by his neatly folded sunshade and air of spry interest.

Those who thought of him at all wondered why he was wasting his time there, but they were in error—quite in error.

Upon the third day, Mr. Lamb met Edward Landor, a gentleman whose name was synonymous in the Malay Straits with such blessed words as tin, rubber, tea and shipping. The meeting was informal.

Little Mr. Lamb simply sat down at the same table in the hotel lounge, ordered a tonic water, and presented his card, his letter of credit and his letter of introduction.

To put the matter more concisely he presented himself to Landor's observation.

There was that about Mr. Lamb—his appearance of being a middle-aged child lost in fairyland—which interested all beholders. In some ways he aroused the predatory instinct, in others the protective. Landor felt the second impulse.

He was surprised and touched by the sight of little Peter Lamb in Menang—as out of place and strange as a rural dean in a jungle where tigers prowled.

After a time Landor felt impelled to speak.

"You are a visitor here?" he asked with a touch of sadness, for it seemed a dangerous pastime for such a little man to be straying unescorted about the East.

"I am, sir," Mr. Lamb admitted gently. "I am, indeed, a tourist. I am wandering about Asia in quest of romance. Some of my experiences have been—well, trying. I like this place. It seems restful here. I intend to stay for a while, quietly."

He smiled, a trifle wryly.

"Get my breath, you know," he explained.

He addressed one who was sure of himself, strong, a master of men and money. Landor's heart was touched by Mr. Lamb. Cultured visitors were few at Menang, and Landor respected learning, and pitied it.

He read Mr. Lamb as a scholar chasing the fickle will-o'-the-wisp, Adventure, and ill-fitted for the pursuit.

As they talked together this first impression was confirmed, and Landor was pleased.

It is satisfactory to be right in one's judgments.

He ordered another whisky, and

Mr. Lamb was persuaded to take another tonic water.

"Well, well, well," said Landor, "and so you design stained-glass. That must be very beautiful work. Out of my line, but beautiful—what? I've always loved good church windows. We don't see much of those refinements out here, but I'm going home next year, and it will be splendid to get in touch with all those things which seem to stand for home out here—church windows, eh?"

LANDOR, the exile, felt almost sentimental about stained glass. He thought of quiet little English churches by quiet little English villages. He saw himself, without any justification, spending lots of time in such places when he went home.

Mr. Lamb was delighted.

"Really," he cried, "if you are anywhere near Salisbury I do hope you will see the window at St. Michael. It is——"

He described the window, and many others, with such childlike zest that his listener was charmed.

Landor liked a man who liked his job. That was one of his rules, and he had found it as much to his credit as to the other man's.

Mr. Lamb's imagination did not falter for a moment. He put new windows in half the cathedrals in England. They had tiffen together, and parted friends.

The resident's fears were heightened upon the following day when he learned that the small man had been robbed of one hundred dollars—obviously robbed at cards on the previous evening.

A half-formed resolution took shape into a pressing invitation to Mr. Lamb to spend the rest of his stay at the Landor estate.

"For," thought its owner, "I really can't leave this Lamb at large, at least while I can do anything to save him."

Mr. Lamb, protesting, but with eyes brimming with gratitude, was finally borne off, to the intense chagrin of the publican and his card-playing friends who had marked him down, but had been unable to tempt him into a game up to that time.

"You will get a real rest at my place," Landor promised. "I am a widower, but have a housekeeper, a dear old soul, who looks after me well. And I'm sure you'll like my daughter."

THE house stood on a rise surrounded by the blue-gray battalions of the rubber-trees. Behind it rose purple ranges. In the distance was the tantalizing gleam of the sea; and far-off the windows of Menang were turned to diamonds by the sunshine. There was a wide veranda from which all these sights could be enjoyed. The hospitality was faultless. Mr. Lamb, a weary pilgrim, rested.

Landor was a true prophet about Mr. Lamb's feeling toward his daughter. At their first meeting he looked at her, a kind of dazzled wonder brightening his faded eyes and, holding her young hand in his thin fingers, said:

"If an old man's compliment is not rude, Miss Landor, you might have served for the model of St. Cecilia in the West transept at York."

As he said this, his guileless features confessed his grief that the compliment could be no more than that of an old man.

Celia Landor was sorry for him and accepted his little speech tenderly, becoming his friend.

This served to confirm her father's good opinion of Mr. Lamb, despite the insinuations of Mrs. Porter, who branded him a "mysterious stranger" and declared she had no liking for him.

Mrs. Porter considered that he looked at her in a manner only to be described as "foxy."

In his tactful fashion Mr. Lamb kept his opinion of her to himself.

FOR all the household's outward calm, it only took Mr. Lamb a day to discover that strange events were afoot and that in knowing this he was wiser than his host.

There was suppressed excitement in the air, whispered consultations between Celia and Mrs. Porter while the father was absent, and a brightness in Celia's eyes at times and a sadness about Celia's mouth at times which could not pass unnoticed, even by such a guest as Mr. Lamb.

He meditated upon these phenomena while dozing on the veranda, and came to the conclusion that they arose from love, a romantic love sauced with mystery.

As they talked together in comradeship Mr. Lamb's mild glances saw that for all her innocence and freshness, for all the blue of the sea in her eyes and the gold of the sun in her hair, Miss Landor was a tropical flower ripe for love.

At this he sighed, envying the man so fortunate and so young that he might win and wear such a bloom.

But he also wondered at the whisperings and the secrecy.

His host's wonderings, however, were confined to the chances of a rise in rubber, the prospects for tin, and the comings and goings of steamers all the way to Yokohama in one direction and to Bombay in the other.

Mr. Lamb was too wise to write him down as a careless father on that account. He knew that the Landor activities had as their main objective the elevation of Celia to the position of an heiress of the first rank, who would make her bow in England next year.

Though his fears were based solely on instinct, he felt sorry for Landor.

When his host was called away for a day and a night Mr. Lamb, of course, decided to end his visit forthwith, but, pressed, cajoled and bullied, eventually allowed himself to remain, a happy prisoner.

Miss Landor accompanied her father to Menang in the car, and returned after lunch.

Mr. Lamb was aware that the excitement was now bubbling openly.

The revelation of the volcano on which Landor's happiness was built came later in the afternoon, when Celia joined Mr. Lamb, where he meditated upon the shimmer of the sea.

"Now, I can tell you," she burst out. "Now, I can let you into the secret. I was frightened before that you might tell father. That would have ruined everything!"

Mr. Lamb sat upright, betraying astonishment at the suggestion that there was a secret.

"That surprised you, didn't it?" asked Celia. "Well, I'm too excited to prolong the suspense. I'm in love!"

"Ah!" mourned Mr. Lamb, and a shadow, which owed nothing to artifice, fell upon his face.

THE story to which he listened so attentively was appropriate to that setting and probably owed much to it. The hero, fittingly, was endowed with all the virtues of heart, soul and form.

On hearing the list of his qualities Mr. Lamb sighed again, having none of these things.

The god-like lover was a mining engineer, traveling in those parts, but lingering, because the daughter of the house of Landor was exceedingly fair. His courtship had been of the dashing and impetuous order.

Mr. Lamb gathered that it had swept away the beautiful young lady, who dwelt in tropical seclusion.

"What is his name?" he asked, when there was room for a word.

"Sidney," said Miss Landor, "Sidney Street."

At this Mr. Lamb grew more interested than ever.

"The name is familiar to me," he remarked.

"Probably," agreed Miss Landor, not without pride. "Out here he is only a mining engineer, without much money and struggling for a living, but he comes of a good family in England, a very good family and a wealthy one. He is here because they wanted him to marry and settle down, but he would not."

She smiled radiantly.

"Now, he'll be glad enough to do so," she said. "Very glad!"

"I can understand that," said Mr. Lamb, with his Old-World bow.

"He is," she added quite nonchalantly, "a very close relative of the Duke of Westminster."

She glanced at Mr. Lamb, to note the effect of this, and, being unable to read what was passing behind his high forehead, saw no more than courteous interest.

"Really," he remarked. "I hope I am to have the pleasure of meeting him?"

"You shall, now!" she promised significantly.

"Now?"

His prompting was rewarded with the second half of the story, the half that mattered. It came with a rush.

Father, for reasons known only to fathers, had taken a violent dislike to Sidney at their first meeting. At their second meeting, without any justification, he had been violently rude and forbidden Sidney to come to the house.

"Naturally, I was not going to be put off like that, just by unjust prejudice," Miss Landor declared.

"Naturally," agreed Mr. Lamb, pitying fathers.

His tone was so reasonable, his sympathy so obvious, his gentle understanding of the woes of lovers so commendable that nothing remained to debar him from learning the thrilling climax.

Mr. Lamb heard, with mixed emotions, that he was to be the happy witness of *love finding a way, despite all prejudices.*

Sidney, it seemed, had gone into retirement with a friend on an adjoining plantation. There had been secret meetings, kisses and vows, and now—

"Tonight we're going to elope, you see," Miss Landor explained with dramatic simplicity. "This is our chance. A boat leaves tonight for Singapore. We shall be abroad!"

HER face was flushed with joy and triumph, but little Mr. Lamb was distressed.

"My dear, my dear!" he cried. "But what about your father? You love your father, my dear?"

"Of course," was the indignant answer. "He's just the dearest, sweetest old thing in the world, but he doesn't understand, and he's pigheaded. He expects me to give up Sidney simply because he doesn't like him. I can't do that; not even for dad.

"But when he finds we're married; when he discovers how much in love we were, and how happy we are, he'll have to forgive us and be delighted to.

"He's never denied me anything. He wouldn't have the heart. And it will be the same with Sidney's people.

"Why, Sidney says that when we get home we'll have a second honeymoon on the Duke's yacht, the *Flying Cloud.*"

"Ah," said Mr. Lamb, rejoicing with her, but at the same time he reiterated: "I should like to meet Sidney."

"You shall. He's coming here tonight to dinner. You'll love him. There's no longer any need for secrecy. We can be quite open until we get down to Menang. You see,

Mrs. Porter's womanly insight makes her ever so much wiser than poor, dear old dad. She thinks I'm doing the right thing. She married for love, and never regretted it. She's on Sidney's side."

"She would be," assented Mr. Lamb, having considered the situation.

Celia Landor, misunderstanding, liked him more than ever.

"Wait, you'll be meeting him in an hour, but I must show you his photograph!"

"Do," urged Mr. Lamb, eagerly, and waited.

HAVING studied the features of the man whose name was familiar—and remarkably handsome features they were—little Mr. Lamb looked up into the face of the girl, who was beyond his reach, and his expression alarmed and disappointed her.

"I believe you don't like him!"

Mr. Lamb stood up, and very gravely, quietly and earnestly gave his testimony.

"No," he said, "I know him too well. He is no relative of the Duke of Westminster. His name is not Sidney Street. And he comes from no family. He is *Reg the Gent*."

Celia collapsed into her chair and gaped at Mr. Lamb as if he had gone out of his mind. But Mr. Lamb's smooth and level voice went on, painful and insistent as the voice of conscience.

"He's probably the best cracksman in the world. There's no such thing as a 'safe' when he's about. Last August he was sentenced for the fifth time for burglarly and declared an habitual criminal. There were also three charges of bigamy against him. The police of the world have been looking for him ever since he escaped from gaol three months later after murdering a warder."

The girl sat rigid, unable to credit that this was happening; unable to believe that she was awake and that little Mr. Lamb was really saying those things. She found her voice at last, but the music had gone out of it.

"Oh, it's a lie, a horrible lie!" she panted.

"No, it is the truth," said Mr. Lamb, who earned his living by being convincing.

"It's a lie; it's——"

But because she had a sudden foreboding that it was not, Celia did a very mid-Victorian thing: she fainted.

Mr. Lamb was distressed. He felt he had been cruel and too direct; he reproached himself.

But when Celia opened her eyes again Mr. Lamb was still there, like a small but unescapable fact which could not be brushed aside or disdained, and on which the course of three lives turned.

After a period during which he was very patient and forebearing, Mr. Lamb's personality and talents won the day.

"You see," he said, "in this way the truth of all I say can be tested without any harm, if there is no harm. Look at me, and realize how serious I am."

Miss Landor looked at Mr. Lamb, and saw the strongest argument of all.

SIDNEY STREET assigned the fact that he was left alone for half an hour after his arrival to the rush of preparations. There was justification for this. He did not mind, for he had plenty to do.

Mr. Lamb had judged he would have, and had made his plans accordingly.

He delayed his entry until the moment before Celia made hers.

His business completed, Street was sitting on the veranda glancing at the *Times*. He looked very handsome,

well-groomed and comfortable in the light of the shaded lamp.

He glanced up with a welcoming smile as Mr. Lamb entered, but his expression changed completely and abruptly. The appearance of Mr. Lamb was far from that likely to cause alarm, but that was its effect on Sidney Street.

"Good God, *you?*"

He sprang to his feet, the paper crumpled in his hands, his eyes staring. That was all he said before he saw Celia in the doorway, but the three words were more eloquent than all those spoken at a General Election.

"Mr. Street, I believe," murmured Mr. Lamb.

Celia introduced them. There was tension in the air. A boy brought cocktails, but even cocktails were no remedy for their disquiet. Celia's face was very pale and her voice was inclined to tremble, but Street was too preoccupied to be aware of her distress.

Mr. Lamb did not know much about such things, but he felt that this was not the kind of party to usher in an elopement.

When Celia spoke he saw that she, too, was aware of this fact.

"You're all very dull and quiet," she said. "Whatever's the matter with you, Sidney?"

"Me, darling—why nothing. Well, perhaps just a touch of fever."

Sidney was to be observed struggling to appear at ease, but obviously there was something the matter with him, and the trouble arose from mild Mr. Lamb.

Mr. Lamb's respect and admiration grew with every moment, for Celia was playing her part as well as she could in heart-breaking circumstances and following his instructions to the letter.

In due course, she began to repeat the gossip of Menang, gathered that day, and she achieved the effect of making idle conversation sufficiently well to serve.

Mr. Lamb would have given much to applaud, but contented himself with polite attention.

"Just fancy," she said at last. "Mrs. Haroldson told me that her husband said we might expect some excitement in sleepy old Menang at any moment—a big arrest. A real sensation. Detective Lynch, of Scotland Yard, arrived this morning. He—"

SHE was watching Sidney Street carefully. There was no need to go on. His face and body set for the fraction of a moment, and a convulsive jerk sent his glass flying from the arm of his chair. The results of this accident were many. The glass was broken, a rug was ruined and a romance was shattered into little, painful fragments sharp as those upon the floor.

A boy hurried from the shadows. Street, mumbling regrets, hastened to gather up the pieces, and Celia, with one glance at her rescuer, which told that a damage had been done which could never be set right, fled.

Mr. Lamb and his friend of other days were alone. He acted promptly.

"That was news to me," he said quietly, "but it only makes my point more obvious. You're getting out of here, Reg, alone. Shove along. There's nothing doing here for which you should hang around. I'll see to that."

The language and the bearing of *Reg the Gent* belied his nickname, but Mr. Lamb was not upset.

"Lynch may be after you for all you know," Reg stormed.

"A misstatement," said Mr. Lamb. "Lynch hasn't any interest in me. He has in you. I need not press the point. You've two minutes in which to get out of his house, and if you don't I'll tell Miss Landor everything, and then Lynch'll get some news which'll please him."

"You wouldn't dare," snarled *Reg the Gent*, with unbecoming embellishments.

"Wouldn't I?" asked Mr. Lamb, and to one who knew him in days gone by there was no need to say any more.

THERE was a moment's pause, and then Reg sprang at Mr. Lamb.

The small man moved with swift precision, and, as a conjurer produces the vanished coin, a revolver was in his hand.

Reg the Gent, who comprehended what a revolver was, stood still.

There was a longer pause.

"I know you; you know me," chided Mr. Lamb. "I'm your best friend. Catch that boat, you fool. Sorry to spoil your game, but I'm set on doing just that. And there's another thing——"

Altogether the interview was extremely painful. Mr. Lamb made it manifest that the affair grieved him as much as it grieved the associate of his unregenerate youth.

At times it seemed inevitable that the aid of sudden death would have to be invoked on one side or the other, but both knew that sudden death's intrusion into such discussions had unpleasant consequences for all parties.

And so, in the end, a silent Mr. Lamb and a frowning and puzzled Mrs. Porter sat down to the dinner prepared for four.

Mr. Sidney Street had left on urgent business, and Miss Landor, unfortunately, had lost her appetite along with her romance.

EDWARD LANDOR, having heard the story, dried the tears, said some stern words, forgave the deception, promised that the trip home would take place almost at once instead of next year, and found solace for his fatherly hurt in the vindication of his judgment upon that fellow Street. He was now discussing the unfortunate affair with the man who had done him such noble service.

Mr. Lamb was modesty itself.

"I only thank my stars," said he, "that my hobby, my interest in the criminal classes, should have brought such good fruit. I'd have risked my life to prevent your daughter being made the victim of such a man, even if I had not been under a debt to you."

"You did risk your life!"

"Oh, no, I had your revolver."

"But you knew it wasn't loaded, man!" cried the big man, wondering at the courage of this little innocent; the courage of ignorance.

"Good heavens," gasped Mr. Lamb, "you don't think I'd have dared touch it if it had been?"

Landor had to fling back his head and laugh. The quaintness of this speech coming from a man who had bluffed a murderer appealed to him.

"I quite agree with you that Mrs. Porter should have shown more discretion," Landor went on. "She's got her marching orders. She leaves today."

"That is very wise," said Mr. Lamb, and he thought: "That's another undesirable marriage I have saved this family," but he did not trouble to mention the fact.

"It was sheer genius, that story about the detective," Landor was chuckling. "The proof and the means of getting rid of him in one. I'd like to have seen his face. I really can't grudge him the ten thousand he stole from the safe."

"I'm glad you say that," said Mr. Lamb.

"I can never repay you," vowed Mr. Landor.

"Not at all! Not at all!" said Mr. Lamb.

His host knew that he could not and he was sad, for he was a rich man and a grateful man.

THOUGH pressed to stay indefinitely, the welcome guest had passed on. He sat in his cabin outward bound, again at the mercy of the world. The small black book lay open on his knee.

"Really, I am incorrigible," mused little Mr. Lamb, as he made a profit entry for ten thousand dollars. "But it's all for the best. He couldn't very well offer me a reward, and he didn't even grudge *Reg the Gent* the money. He was so pleased it was only that. It was good for Reg. I never could do anything with safe locks myself. I simply couldn't let him get away with such good cash. It was worth ten thousand to Landor to be rid of Mrs. Porter. If I'd been in his shoes I'd have paid it."

He thought deeply.

"If — if," he murmured with a sad, small smile, "I'd been fifteen years younger and as handsome as Reg I might have been marrying an heiress with whom I was really in love!"

The sixth story of this series, "The Green Eye—And So On," will appear in our next issue, out May 1.

Lo! the Poor Unicorn

Early naturalists firmly believed in the unicorn. It was an animal with the head and body of a horse, the legs of a buck and the tail of a lion, and from its forehead projected a single slender horn.

It was depicted as having a red head and white body. Its great enemy was the lion who in combat deserted his kingly arts and descended to trickery.

Luring the unicorn to pursue him among trees, at a fitting moment the lion dodged behind a tree into which the charging unicorn thrust his horn, and so was imprisoned while the king of beasts gave the deathblow.

There was but one sure method of capturing the unicorn alive. A virgin maid was induced to seat herself in the haunts of the unicorn, which, seeing her beauty and innocence, would venture forth, lay its head in her lap, and in a drowsy state could be captured by the hunters.

The elephant went in terror of this beast. A single stroke of the horn could pierce its thick hide.

For evidence that the beast existed, medieval physicians produced the horn. A morsel of it rendered poisons harmless and purified doubtful water.

The Pilgrim Fathers carried a unicorn horn with them, and as late as 1789 it was used to test the royal food of France. Cups made of the horn were looked on as a great treasure.

Unfortunately for the fame of the fantastic beast, those historic horns preserved in various museums have been found to be those of the narwhal.

The lion and the unicorn still continue to wage a heraldic contest in the arms of Great Britain.

Side Shows and Ships

By JAMES L. FORD

ONE summer's afternoon, not very many years ago, while wandering aimlessly through the byways of Coney Island, I came upon a shabby building whose entire front was covered with great flaring pictures in crude colors, above which ran the legend: "DeGuere's Palace of Curiosities."

I knew at once that I was in the presence of a dime museum, perhaps the last relic of a form of diversion I had believed extinct.

That this humble house of entertainment should have drifted down to end its days among the various human waifs and strays who choose these wave-swept shores for their final exit from life, seemed to me eminently right and fitting.

I crossed the narrow street the better to view the pictures that made such a brave showing in the face of imminent dissolution, and a single glance told me that they were the work of DeGuere himself, than whom no more versatile craftsman ever appeared in the humbler strata of the amusement business.

During the years of my apprenticeship to the craft of letters I had come to know De Guere well and had drawn from him material for many a story for the Sunday papers.

Countless were the callings followed during what I may call the formative period of my literary career. He had a large studio in which he painted museum signs and, later, a smaller one in which he tattooed sailors in coatings of many colors.

Equally expert with brush or needle, each occupation yielded him a living. But the dime museum, then at the height of its vogue, cast its compelling spell over him and weaned him from all other pursuits, so that he invested his savings in a Bowery venture where, despite the added blandishment of the "envelope game," he lost everything and became a lecturer in another establishment.

In this capacity, he revealed talents that surprised even those who, like myself, had noted his exploits in previous fields of endeavor. But, clever as he was in other lines, it was as a painter of signs that he displayed something akin to crude genius.

For several minutes I stood gazing at the rude but effective canvases on the museum's wall, and more than ever before did I appreciate the skill of the painter.

They were of the late decades of the last century, and designed to show the joy, wonder or terror awakened on the faces of the great ones of the earth on beholding the nation's favorite monstrosities. And I shall add that the likeness of each of the great ones was unmistakable.

There was England's queen turning the skipping-rope for the Three-Leg-

ged Girl to dance, the sovereign's countenance radiant with delight as was that of Mr. Gladstone who stood beside her.

There was Bismarck, he who altered the Emms dispatch with the placidity of a polar bear, his face distorted with fear at the sight of the Man-Eating Gorilla, brought before him in chains by a file of soldiers.

There, too, were Lee and Grant, their hands clasped in amity, as they welcomed the Wild Man of Borneo to their presence.

Not one of these spirited historical canvases was lacking in what Art critics term "the needed note of color." Together they held out glorious promise of marvels to be viewed for a paltry dime.

HAVING drunk my fill of this prodigal display of a school of Art now as extinct as the form of diversion to which it owed its being, I entered the building and was greeted by DeGuere with the cordiality due from a showman to a reporter, in which capacity he readily recalled me.

His wife, whom I had last seen as a Circassian Bride of the Sultan, came forward with outstretched hand and smiling lips.

Glancing about me, I could see no fulfillment of the promise of instructive entertainment held out to the passers-by through the medium of brush and canvas. The aspect of the place was singularly forlorn and poverty-stricken.

The platforms, designed for the exhibition of the grotesque and abnormal, were dusty and empty; neither patron nor ticket-taker was visible and I saw, with real regret, that the museum was on its last legs.

But DeGuere had faced disaster too many times in the course of his career to be cast down in spirit by his present dreary environment.

With a sweep of his arm he directed my attention to the noble proportions of what he called his "curio hall," adding:

"If I had only a few good curiosities, I could pack the place."

Yet while DeGuere spoke there had drawn near to us the rarest and loveliest human curiosity I have ever seen in even the most pretentious hall of exhibition, and I turned as Mrs. DeGuere said:

"Let me make you acquainted with my daughter, Myrtle."

I am a poor hand at describing feminine beauty, for in my opinion woman's chief glory lies not in regularity of features, but in that which is indescribable.

My first feeling as I fixed my gaze on the young girl who stood beside her mother, timidly holding out her hand, was one of amazement at the blooming of such a flower in such unlikely soil.

And I took but scant heed of her slender and graceful figure or the tasteful arrangement of her light brown hair. What did attract me was the steadfast look in her clear blue eyes and the sweetness of her expression.

She must have seen the admiration that shone in my eyes, for a delicate color came into her cheeks, and she shyly withdrew the small white hand that rested so confidingly in mine and turned away.

At this moment there flashed across my mind a prophetic vision of some romance, I knew not what, awaiting this girl in the years that lay before her.

That I was right in my conjecture, the story I am about to tell will show, and I am proud to remember that the part I played in it helped to its fulfillment.

As the girl's lover I was *hors de concours*, by reason of the difference in our ages, but I was thoroughly con-

tent to enact the minor rôle assigned to me by the Fates that cast the piece.

DURING the remainder of the summer, I was a constant visitor to the Island, and never failed to find a friendly welcome at the Palace of Curiosities. I found ample opportunity for improving my acquaintance with the girl, who had enchained my purely impersonal interest and whom I regarded with a respect so obvious that her wise and prudent mother placed no bar on our growing intimacy.

In this way I learned much of her previous history, and indulged in many futile conjectures regarding the romance that I was sure awaited her.

Born literally under the canvas that sheltered a circus sideshow, she had grown up in a world peopled by monstrosities of every kind.

The seventeen years of her life had been spent in journeying from one place of exhibition to another with parents who watched over her so carefully that she had remained shy, naïve, innocent and sweet-tempered to a degree that was a constant source of amazement to me.

The girl's complete lack of coquetry and affectation made acquaintance with her an easy matter, and my third call found us on terms of friendship quite befitting the difference in our ages. I believe it was on that occasion that she gave me quite a shock by exhibiting her photograph album, remarking with innocent pride that it contained the portraits of all her dearest friends.

These friends proved to be the different freaks she had become acquainted with during her years of flitting to and from the museums in which her parents gained their bread.

Most of the photographs bore inscriptions from their givers, such as "To Myrtle, with love from the Dog-Faced Boy," or "With best love from both of us—Millie-Christine," a name that recalled memories of two Negresses bound together from birth. The album did not contain the likeness of a single normal person.

I am afraid that I looked my disgust for DeGuere, who regarded the collection of monstrosities with pride as evidence of his daughter's popularity, came forward and turned the pages with the remark:

"You may think that a funny-looking lot of friends, but it's all the friends she has. We're a family of museum folk and we'll never be anything else. Thank God, any one of us can always make a living at it. I fixed up a little sum for her long ago so she'll never starve."

His daughter's sweet face flushed angrily as she retorted:

"I don't want to hear another word about what you did for me. If I ever have to make a living it wont be on a museum platform."

Her repugnance to that calling seemed strange to me in view of the affection with which she regarded the freaks portrayed in the album whose pages she continued to turn.

"There's the Elastic-Skinned Man," she exclaimed, indicating the photograph of a person of commonplace appearance.

"He was a lovely gentleman, so refined and quiet. Quite a scholar, too, and used to read books between lectures. And here's the Fat Lady who worked on the platform next to Mamma when we had a long date in Philadelphia. She was just as sweet a lady as you ever met."

"They are all good folks in that book, every one of them," said DeGuere. "She needn't be ashamed of working alongside of any of them."

"I'm not ashamed of them, but I intend to do something else," the girl retorted with a heat that seemed to me uncalled-for and set me wondering if her refusal were due to any secret

cause. She went on, with heightened color:

"These curiosities were always nice to me, but I don't want to be a curiosity myself."

I never heard her allude to the museum folk as "freaks."

Finding myself alone with DeGuere a few moments later, I spoke of his daughter's repugnance to the profession in which she had been born and reared, and in which she had so many friends.

She had told me of playing *Eva* in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in museums large enough to contain a theatre, and had said how much she enjoyed the work. Why, then, did she balk at appearing in the specialty, probably in the line of singing or dancing, prepared for her by a parent whose skill in such matters I could not doubt.

"What kind of act have you arranged for your daughter?" I inquired.

"As nice a turn as you ever saw, and very refined," he replied. "Too good for a museum, as the business is now, but worth good money in a circus side-show. She thinks it isn't genteel enough for her. She has an idea she could get away with a singing specialty if she could have her voice trained. But she'll know better when she's a few years older."

I knew that among his other accomplishments DeGuere possessed unusual gifts as a discoverer of museum attractions, and as a creator of short acts designed to place his discoveries before the ten-cent public in pleasing form. That he had devised some scheme for the display of his daughter's talents, I could readily believe.

ABOUT this time I began to notice in Myrtle's face a certain wistful, almost melancholy look which had not attracted my attention at first and which was apt to reveal itself when her features were in repose.

I wondered if, despite her limited opportunities for meeting young men, she had already found the romance I had scheduled for her later years.

I observed also that she cherished some unspoken resentment against her father, while her love for her mother was unmistakable. Ever quick to jump at conclusions, I inferred that he was responsible for her unfortunate love affair.

It was evident to me now that the little Coney Island museum was on its last legs, and that very soon there would be no more places of its kind on our continent.

Mrs. DeGuere was quite in accord with me in this belief. But her husband stoutly maintained that the current public indifference to the once-popular form of diversion was only temporary, and that there would be cheap museums so long as the world lasted.

But his wife and I were right. The next time I visited the Island the huge paintings had vanished and the building they had obscured was dark, closed and tenantless.

And with the closing of their humble hall of entertainment the DeGueres had disappeared completely from the scene. Although I made anxious inquiry in the neighborhood, I could learn nothing of their whereabouts.

But Myrtle was too rare and too lovely a human flower to be quickly forgotten, and I never gave up hope of seeing her again. I visited the side-show of every circus that came to town and made countless inquiries of persons connected with the cheaper kinds of amusement enterprises. Although the DeGuere family were known to many of these strollers, none could tell me where they were to be found.

My interest in the girl grew rather than diminished with the passing years. Her pretty face with its sug-

gestion of hidden sorrow haunted my memory, and again and again I cursed myself for my insensate folly in thinking of her so often.

IT was at least five years after their departure from Coney Island that I ran across the DeGueres again, and then Myrtle appeared before me as unexpectedly as when I first met her in her father's museum.

It happened that my duties led me one afternoon to a remote quarter of the city, and there, feeling the need of refreshment, I entered an inconspicuous little restaurant of neat and cleanly aspect. I was about to make my way to a table when my course was arrested by a slim, white hand stretched across the desk that served as the receipt of custom.

I heard my name uttered in tones of frank delight. I turned my head and found myself face to face with Myrtle DeGuere, holding out a welcoming hand and gazing at me with the old friendly look in her blue eyes.

For a moment I stood staring at her in helpless amazement, and it was not until she said, "Have you forgotten me?" that I recovered myself sufficiently to return her greeting with a warmth that brought color to her cheeks and a sparkle to her eyes.

"I couldn't forget you!" I exclaimed, forgetting to let go of the hand that rested so agreeably in my own. "And I have hunted for you everywhere for the last five years. Where have you been hiding, and what has brought you here?"

"A bit of good fortune brought me here. Mamma and I bought this place cheap a year ago and we're running it together. She is in the kitchen now while I attend to the finances. Since the museum went on the rocks I've worked in three or four places."

"And your father?" I asked.

"Dead these three years," she answered.

"Did you ever do that specialty he fixed for you? He told me that you could make a good living with it in any museum."

"Please don't ever speak of that again," she replied in a voice that showed her annoyance. "My father laid a curse on me when he tried to give me a means of livelihood. I can't quite forgive him, even if he is in his grave."

AS I stood talking to her across the counter I could not help observing how gently the passing years had dealt with her.

There was purpose now in her manner of speaking and strength in the face that had once been girlishly sweet and winning. There was a new firmness in the mouth that seemed made for kisses, and decision in the quick movements of her slim and well-kept hands.

All my old interest in her was now fully awake, and I wondered if the romance I had built for her in my mind had yet crossed her path.

"How about sweethearts?" I inquired with a sly but winning smile.

But the topic seemed as distasteful to her as the museum platform, for her mouth hardened perceptibly as she retorted:

"I have no sweetheart, for the simple reason that I shall never marry. Are you going to eat some of those cream cakes in the window? I made them myself. I must have guessed that you were coming."

The cakes were delicious, as was the coffee brought smoking hot from the kitchen by Mrs. DeGuere who, after gazing at me with amazement, gave me a most cordial welcome and seated herself at my table to chat while I ate.

"We often speak of you, Myrtle and I," she began, "and sometimes we see your name signed to pieces in the papers. Those cakes are nice and

they're not the only things she can cook. I tell you she would make a good wife for somebody. That always makes her angry, for she hates the idea of marrying."

"But surely she must have had plenty of chances," I interrupted; "a girl as pretty and as nice as your daughter ought to have any number of men to choose from."

"So she has, but she gives them all the frozen face the minute they begin to take notice of her. You might not think of it, but she is a very obstinate girl, and when she makes up her mind nothing will shake it. It was the same thing when her father wanted her to go on the platform and earn good money, as he'd always intended she should.

"We're a museum family and nothing else, and God gave her a pretty face and figure so she could make her living out of them. Barnum gave that prize beauty of his ten thousand dollars, or said he did, and Myrtle has her beaten a mile.

"We're playing pretty close to the cushion in this little joint, and if she would only work summers with the Barnum or some other circus, she'd bring back money enough in the fall to make everything easy for us.

"It's nice work, too, and when she gets used to it she wont mind showing herself as a beauty. Besides, it is her plain duty and I wish you would talk to her and make her see it as I do."

"Was Mamma telling you that I ought to go with some side-show as a human curiosity?" said Myrtle as I paused at her desk on my way out.

I admitted that she had and remarked persuasively that as her parents had always been so good to her she should consider her mother's wishes.

"They were good to me all right, but the best of parents make mistakes and mine made a grand mistake when they took it for granted I'd go on the platform," she replied with decision. "I wont do it and that's all there is to it."

"And shall you continue to give every young man who courts you the frozen face?" I ventured.

She regarded me steadily for a moment, and the color crept into her cheeks as she made answer:

"I must not think of marriage. It would be wrong to encourage any of those young men. Please don't ever say anything about it to me again."

I knew from her manner of speaking that she was in deadly earnest.

Scenting a double mystery, my interest in her grew. I became a frequent patron of the restaurant, where I never failed to have a little chat with the pretty cashier.

More than once I brought a friend with me and was always pleased to note the approval with which Myrtle was regarded. On one of these visits my companion was Tom Hilton, an adventurous young man who followed the sea and had risen from the humble post of cabin boy on a sailing vessel to that of second mate on a steam freighter trading between New York and South American ports.

Tom, who did not once take his eyes from Myrtle while we ate, demanded an introduction and I performed the ceremony willingly, knowing him to be a young man of good principles as well as good looks.

BUT as we stood leaning on the counter, I noticed that the girl's gaze was fixed not on his face but on the sunburnt hand and forearm that protruded from the loose sleeve of his coat. Following her gaze, he said apologetically:

"I was fool enough to get tattooed when I first went to sea, as every

young sailor did in those days. But now I wish I hadn't."

"Why do you wish that? I think that anchor is real pretty," she remarked as she inspected it critically.

"The anchor is well enough and I ought to have stopped at it, but the able seaman in the fo'csle of my first ship saw that I was a greenhorn and told me I must get all covered with pictures if I ever expected to command a ship.

"And they made me believe a lot of religious pictures on my chest would keep me from drowning, if I fell overboard. I was a fool then and no mistake, for I let myself get covered with all sorts of emblems and things."

But Myrtle seemed to regard him with the eye of favor despite his regrettable embellishments, and bestowed on him at parting a smile of singular sweetness, coupled with an invitation to "drop in again when passing."

"My God, but that girl is a beauty and no mistake!" exclaimed Tom as we reached the pavement.

He looked back as he spoke and I saw her eyes meet his, only to be shyly withdrawn.

A fortnight elapsed before I visited the restaurant again and gave my usual order for coffee and cakes. Mrs. DeGuere brought the dainties and seated herself, as she often did, at my table. Her first words, uttered in low tones, were:

"That sailor friend of yours comes in pretty near every afternoon and always has quite a lot to say to Myrtle. He seems all right and I'm quite sure that if he were not you wouldn't have brought him here. A mother has to be very careful, you know, where her daughter is concerned."

I assured her that Tom was all that could be desired, and then asked if he had made a favorable impression upon the young lady, who, I now observed, was staring out of the window as if expecting some one.

"Has she given him the frozen face yet?" I inquired eagerly, wondering if by any chance Myrtle had found an acceptable lover.

"There's no frozen face for him," replied the mother. "I never knew her to take to any young man as she has to him, and it's high time she had a sweetheart for she was twenty-two last July. But she hasn't said a word to me yet. All I know is what I've been able to see and my eyes are pretty sharp where she is concerned."

On my way out I paused, according to my usual practice, at the receipt of custom. Myrtle did not notice my approach, so intently was she gazing out into the street.

"Expecting some one?" I asked as I placed my check and a dollar bill on the desk.

Then she turned her eyes on me and murmured evasively, "Nobody in particular." But my question was fully answered that very moment by the sudden opening of the street door and the quick entrance of the young man of whom we were both thinking.

Never have I seen a face so suddenly transfigured from mere prettiness into rare and wondrous beauty. The color flooded Myrtle's cheeks. I could see the love-light shining in her clear blue eyes as she lifted them fearlessly to meet her lover's.

There was no further need for mystery or concealment so far as I was concerned, and Tom realized that, for he took my hand in his honest sailor grip and said quietly but none the less heartily:

"I can never thank you enough for what you've done for me."

Then, for no apparent reason, he

hurried toward the seat that I had vacated a moment before.

"Myrtle," I said, "is that the man you've been waiting for all these years?"

For a moment she continued to make marks on a bit of paper that meant nothing, and it was not until I repeated my inquiry that she raised her lovely flushed face and, turning her clear, truthful eyes on me, replied:

"If ever I marry a man he will be a sailor. I couldn't possibly marry anyone else. There's a good reason for that. Now I hope you're satisfied."

There was a roguish look in her eyes and a laughing dimple in her cheek as she uttered these last words which lingered in my memory as I made my way along the street.

Tom was due to sail in six weeks, so the marriage was a hurried affair with few presents. It was I who gave the bride away and presided at the little feast given in the room at the rear of the restaurant.

I had feared that Myrtle would insist opon having some of her old museum friends present, but a warning word in the bridegroom's ear caused him to begin his married life in proper fashion by setting his foot down firmly on the proposition.

I had availed myself of the license due as a friend of the family by adding to the excellent repast set forth by Mrs. DeGuere a magnum of champagne. Prohibition had not then raised the cost of such a luxury to a point above my means—and under its gracious spell Mrs. DeGuere's usually reticent tongue loosened and I resolved to learn from her, if possible, certain things that had always puzzled me in respect to her daughter.

Therefore no sooner had the pair, who could truthfully be styled "happy," departed and Mrs. DeGuere had dried her tears, than I refilled her empty glass and began:

"Now that your daughter is safely and well married, wont you please tell me what your husband did to enable her to earn her living in a museum, and why she refused to oblige him? And why was it that she gave every young man the 'frozen face,' as you called it, until Tom came along?

"She told me once that she would not marry anyone but a sailor. Had she any real reason for that resolve?"

BEFORE replying Mrs. DeCuere slowly drained her glass and then waited while I refilled it:

"I suppose," she said, speaking slowly and thoughtfully, "that you refer to her obstinacy about going on the platform as both her father and I begged her to, time and again?

"Her father took pains when she was little to provide her with a means of livelihood should necessity arise, but she took offense at what he did, though God knows he did it for the best, and it led to bad feeling between them.

"She never forgave him to the day of his death. It was a great grief to him and to me, too, for he did it all for her own good. She was so sensitive about it that I had to promise to keep it a secret, and so I have, to this minute."

Again Mrs. DeGuere paused and sat silently sipping her wine. I went on inexorably, determined to learn the truth:

"I should like to know just what her father did for her and also why she would not consider marrying until the sailor came along? I've had an idea the cause was the same in both cases."

"You've guessed right," she exclaimed with sudden animation;

"she had but the one reason, and as you know that much, I may as well tell you the rest. Years ago when the museum business was at its best there were no better paid attractions than Captain Constantinus, the Tattooed Greek, and Irene Woodward, the Tattooed Lady.

"MY husband got it into his head that a tattooed curiosity would always be a good platform draw. He tattooed Myrtle when she was too young to understand, and she's covered with beautiful pictures from head to foot. With her sweet face and lovely figure she could have copped out her hundred and fifty a week any time she wanted to.

"But when she grew older she got ashamed of the pictures her father had spent so much time on. He was a rare hand with the needle, same as he was with the brush. And she said she wouldn't show herself on the platform, no matter what they paid her. It was the same when she had chances to marry, and good ones, too. She was ashamed to have anybody know about it."

"But she did marry, after all," I said.

"Well, he's tattooed, too, so she thought it wouldn't matter."

Red Indian Magic

The Indians of North America were as expert as the Indians of the East in the performance of feats of a mysterious and apparently inexplicable nature, many of which formed part of their tribal and religious ceremonies.

Ages before, when the brothers Davenport appeared on the scene with their cabinet tricks, Indian medicine men would allow themselves to be tied hand and foot with leather thongs. Then in plain view of all, and not screened from observation like the Davenports and their modern imitators, shake their bonds loose instantly, without apparent effort or touch of the hand.

They could handle burning brands, walk through and over fire, or plunge hands and arms into boiling water or syrup without a scorch. Like the oriental fakirs they could plunge knives into vital parts and to all appearances kill each other, and yet spring up unharmed.

They also practiced the hypnotism of crowds, transforming a stick into a serpent, like Moses of old, or making inanimate objects move from one spot to another.

But more than these feats of legerdemain or will power, they were skilled in other arts concerning which we are still in the dark. Like the Highlanders of Scotland they possessed second sight, and could foretell events. They had also preceded the disciples of Mesmer in healing mentally, being able to cure the sick by rubbing, stroking and the laying on of hands, a matter now being cautiously accepted by the churches.

The Most Mysterious Happening in My Life

As related by LENORE ULRIC

(Star of "Lulu Belle")

to

BIDE DUDLEY

IT was in Lenore Ulric's dressing-room at the Belasco Theatre. I lolled in a chair as the star of "Lulu Belle" touched up her eyebrows, preparatory to escorting *Lulu* through a matinee performance.

"Well, Miss Ulric," I said, "I am here to get a story on the greatest mystery in your life."

She laughed.

"The first mystery that occurs to me," she replied, "is why people should call me 'The Mystery Actress.' I'm not mysterious."

"The reason," I said, "is because you are seen so little outside the theatre."

"Well, the title is misplaced," she returned. "My time is so thoroughly taken up with my work and studies that I have to save my strength for a strenuous acting season.

"There is nothing mysterious about me or my inclinations. Just at present, because I need all my vitality for 'Lulu Belle,' I stay at home and keep as quiet as I can. I think my title should be 'The Sensible Actress.'"

"So do I, Miss Ulric," I agreed. "But, now that we have that matter disposed of, what about a real mystery. Have you never encountered one?"

"Yes, but you wouldn't believe me if I told it to you, so I guess I won't."

I assured her I would accept her word for it and she consented to relate the story.

"This mystery—the one big mystery I ever ran across—concerns, first of all, another Lenore Ulric, or rather, Ulrich. I took the 'H' off the end of my name a few years ago because I considered it superfluous. I use the hard 'C,' you know. The other Lenore is still Ulrich, I presume."

"Just who is she?" I asked.

"That's part of my mystery. She is a violinist, or was. But let me chatter while I'm getting this Lulu Belle complexion on, and I'll elucidate.

"I was appearing in 'The Bird of Paradise' in San Francisco one time when I received a note, delivered by an usher. It said: 'Oh, Lenore, we must see you. Dulcie is with me and we want to talk over old school days. May we come to your dressing-room? —Mame.'

"I was puzzled. I could remember

no Dulcie and no Maine in connection with my school days. Well, you know how strong curiosity is in a woman. I had them come back-stage. Both kissed me before I really knew what was happening.

"'My!' said one. 'How you have changed! Your hair's darker.'

"'Why did you give up the violin for acting?' asked the other.

"'Just a minute, girls!' I said, rather amused. 'What school did we attend?'

"'Oh, now you're teasing us,' pouted one. And so it went. To make a long story short, I convinced them they were barking up the wrong Ulrich tree. They said I looked very much like the other Lenore and then they left, disappointed and crestfallen.

"AS I thought the incident over I began to suspicion the girls. 'There couldn't be another Lenore Ulrich,' I argued to myself. 'The name is unusual. They merely wanted to get a look at an actress in her dressing-room. Their school days' story was an ingenious fake! So I forgot them.

"Two months later I was playing in Kansas City. One night a young woman reporter came to my dressing-room for an interview. Her subject, in the form of a question, was on the tip of her tongue. It was 'Why did you give up the violin to become an actress?'

"'My dear girl,' I replied, 'I never played the violin in my life.'

"'But I heard you, at Convention Hall,' she remonstrated.

"Again I had to explain I was the other Lenore. Once more I was told I looked enough like her to be her twin. The reporter went her way and the matter left my mind again.

"In St. Louis, a week later, I had a letter from a woman who asked if I ever intended resuming my violin work. I didn't answer it. The mix-up was getting on my nerves. Now for the real mystery!

"At the end of that season, I went abroad. In Berlin the newspapers announced I was a visitor and gave the name of my hotel. One day an old man called on me. He said he was Herr Garbitch, a violin instructor. He spoke pretty fair English.

"'I am a Garbitch to a certain extent,' he said, 'but my mother was an Ulrich.'

"'Oh, indeed!' I replied.

"'Yes,' he went on, 'and you are an Ulrich. All the Ulrichs are musicians.'

"'I am not.'

"'Yes—it must be,' he said firmly. 'You are not the first Lenore Ulrich. I taught another one the violin, but she knew it already. It was inborn. However, I inspired her and showed her the fine points.'

"Back to my mind came my experiences in San Francisco, Kansas City and St. Louis. 'Tell me of this violinist known as Lenore Ulrich,' I said.

"'She is an American, too,' he replied. 'She came here. I lent her my spirit. She is a great violinist. You could play, too, if you would try.'

"'No, Herr Garbitch,' I said. 'I never could.' I thought the old fellow was trying to induce me to become a pupil of his. The idea amused me. I had never had a violin in my hands.

"'I do not wish to be rude,' he insisted, 'but you could play the violin if you would try, under my inspiration. The violin is easy for all Ulrichs.'

"I laughed and it seemed to hurt his feelings. Sobering, I told him I possessed absolutely none of the musical talent of the Ulrichs; that I was a dramatic actress and that, while I liked music, I had no inclination or desire to be a musician. He actually scoffed at my words.

"'You have the Ulrich musical talent, but it sleeps,' he said. 'Some day it shall awaken. Let me have your address in America. I would write you.'

"Just to humor him, I gave him my New York address. He put the card in his wallet and prepared to leave. Pointing one bony finger at me, he said:

"'Look at me! Some day I will awaken the Ulrich musical talent. It shall be on my birthday. You shall see.' And out he went.

"When he had gone I dismissed the subject of the musical Ulrichs from my mind.

"I spent a few more weeks in Europe and sailed for home, arriving in New York on a Thursday. The following Thursday I began rehearsing in 'Kiki.' I told Mr. Belasco about my experiences anent the other Lenore and the old violin instructor and he laughed.

"'Too silly to worry over!' was his only comment.

"'I told him I wasn't worrying. I was curious, though, to see the violin-playing Lenore. I never did, but that's getting away from my mystery.

"'KIKI' had been running a fortnight at the Belasco Theatre when I received a letter from Germany, at my home. In it was a picture of Herr Garbitch. It showed him pointing that bony finger right at me. The finger and his eyes found me no matter what the angle. It was a fascinating photograph. The letter said:

"'My birthday will be along soon.' (He gave the date.) 'That day, my little girl, place the picture where it can look at you. Take a violin and stand before the photograph. You will play Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*. Oh, how well you will play it! The latent Ulrich musical ability will come out. You will play—PLAY—on my birthday. For that moment there will be two Lenore Ulrichs who are wonderful violinists.—Garbitch.'

"Right here I want to say that you'll likely accuse me of some sort of a 'Trilby' hallucination, but you promised to believe me. My story is true; 'Trilby' was pure fiction. So you must not make cynical remarks."

"I promised to be nice."

"I spoke of my curiosity once before," she continued. "Well, it gripped me again. On the day he mentioned there was a violin in my home, brought there by a friend to whom I had confided my secret. She was a girl I'll call Kate. Millie, my Negro maid, was there, too. The time had come for me to demonstrate what an old fool Garbitch was.

"Placing the photograph on the mantel, I took the violin. Kate showed me how to hold it. I concentrated my gaze on Garbitch's eyes and bony fingers. Suddenly a great urge to play came over me. I must play—PLAY. And I did. Later, when I came out from under the spell, if that was what it was, Kate swore I had played the *Spring Song* perfectly.

"'It was marvelous,' she gasped.

"'It sho' was nice,' chimed in Millie.

"I smiled. 'You're making fun of me,' I said. 'I don't remember hearing anything but queer sounds.'

"'We're not joking,' said Kate. 'I'm not only dumfounded, but startled.'

"Kate and Millie were so sincere in their statements that I had played the *Spring Song* that I became frightened. I made Kate take her violin home and forbade Millie ever to mention the incident. I put the picture away in a dresser drawer.

"That's part of my mystery," Miss Ulric continued, "but not all. Just before I began rehearsing in 'Lulu Belle,' I had a few friends up at my

home one evening. One of them brought along a violin and played several selections very nicely. Then I remembered something. Coincidental, but I'm telling the truth. I remembered it was the birthday of Garbitch. I had Millie get the picture and put it on the mantel. Then I took the violin.

" 'You may be surprised to learn I am a violinist,' I said, not knowing whether I could prove it or not. 'I will now play the *Spring Song*. I was about to draw the bow across the strings when the man who owned the instrument took a look at the photograph.

" 'Garbitch!' he ejaculated. 'That's strange. Did you see today's *Evening World*?'

" 'No,' I replied. 'What was in it?'

" 'It reported that Garbitch died this morning. He was a noted violin instructor, you know.'

" 'Yes,' I said, slightly bewildered. 'I knew him. He gave me the picture.'

"Then, determined to go through with the weird idea of playing, I drew the bow across the strings. The noises I made were the veriest squeaks.

" 'Awful, Lenore!' shouted my violinist-guest. 'Stop it!'

"So I stopped. Next I took the picture and tore it into a dozen pieces. Nobody but Millie understood what was going through my brain and I didn't explain. The incident was passed over by my guests as an effort on my part to be comical.

"A week later my violinist-guest called me up. 'Had a letter today that should interest you,' he said. 'It's from a pal of mine out West. Says he was to go and hear a girl violinist named Ulrich play recently, but she cancelled her recital. He was wondering if you had been out fiddling. Funny, eh?'

"An idea struck me like a thunderbolt. 'What was the date of the cancelled recital?' I asked.

" 'Let me see,' he replied, evidently looking through the letter. 'Oh, here it is. It was just a week ago—the night we had the little party at your home and you tried to be a violinist.'

" 'The day Garbitch died,' I almost shrieked.

" 'Wait a minute! Don't get excited,' he said. 'I meant to tell you—that report of the death of Garbitch was wrong. He isn't dead at all.'

"Now," concluded Miss Ulric, "you may draw your own conclusions. That's my big mystery."

"Three minutes, Miss Ulric!" said the call-boy, just outside the dressing-room door.

"Coming!" replied the actress. Then to me: "Good-by!"

"Good-by—er—Trilby!" I replied.

The seventh story of this series will be told by

AUGUSTUS THOMAS

It will appear in our next issue—out May 1

The Big Boob

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

BY contrast the girl made everything else in the place look cheap and tawdry. So it seemed to Hugh Freeman, watching her, as he leaned upon a small table and turned his glass of near-beer around and around upon the slopped and crumb-scattered surface.

Big shoulders squared and powerful fingers turning the glass thoughtfully, he considered her every movement upon the dance floor; the way the lamplight gleamed upon the copper of her thick hair, the sudden, graceful movements of her white arms. Within the past ten minutes Fate had taken him by the throat, and he knew it.

Freeman had grown hungry and thirsty during a long drive over Poke o' Moonshine mountain. At the old Three Finger House he had stopped for a sandwich and something wet; for many miles there would be no other place open at this time of night. Without paying much attention to the dancers or the crowd he had walked with his usual easy unconcern to a table near what had been the roaring bar of the roadhouse in the old days.

Now it was an oilcloth-covered counter over which more or less furtive drinks were passed by a man with a face like a mean bulldog.

A sandwich of rubbery bread and indifferent ham was better to a hungry man than nothing. Freeman was still young, but he was old enough to remember when it had been fun to stop at the Three Finger House for a glass of ale and some hot stew.

He did not like the crowd that gathered here now, and he had been hurrying through the sandwich when the dancers cleared at the end of a fox-trot and a girl skimmed out upon the floor like a vivid autumn leaf.

From that instant he neither ate nor drank while she danced, while her feet patted the boards and her round arms swung startlingly perfect against the dim and smoky background of the room.

She had a trick of throwing her head back so that her short hair tossed with a mad gesture. At such moments the white pillar that was her throat revealed itself in its full beauty.

The girl's dress was richly dark and well made and inconspicuous. To Freeman she was in the place, but not of it. Those other girls there at the tables along the wall were for the most part glaring with color. The men with them wore pinched-in coats and flapping trousers. Only the occasional brightly checked shirt of a lumberjack looked like former times.

A few years before the Three Finger House had been noisy and riotous and good hearted. Now it seemed to be something sinister, veneered with a thin veneer.

The girl finished her dance in a patter of hand-clapping. She went to sit down at a table beside a dark, sleek man whose mask-like white face remained immobile as she joined

him. Only the eyes moved, hard and black, roving constantly from door to counter, and over the crowd.

Freeman knew that he himself had been swept and appraised by that cold stare, and that he was being checked up from time to time.

This was not surprising, although it annoyed him. He had been mistaken for an officer before this. The set of his head and shoulders and the directness of his deep blue gaze had something to do with it; and the air of authority that came from long handling of men on his wood jobs. There was no one in the room whom he knew and therefore no one from whom a friendly nod would have marked him as "safe."

FREEMAN got up and walked to the counter. He put down a five-dollar bill and looked into the mottled, suspicious eyes of the man on the other side; a fellow with the quick, well-placed arm movements of a boxer and a lipless line in place of a mouth.

The sleeves of his soiled white coat were filled so that the cloth strained. He rubbed the oilcloth with a vigorous arm, searching Freeman with a long look before he picked up the money.

"Who's the girl that just danced?" asked Freeman in a quiet voice.

The eyes of the man flickered; in the same moment he looked over toward her and made an almost imperceptible gesture with his head, swept up the bill, and shortchanged Freeman a dollar. It was done cleverly, by counting four one dollar bills from a handful and leaving only three of them in a pile on the counter.

"She's the entertainer," he replied huskily. "Peg Marvel."

Freeman picked up his change, flipped the bills under the eyes of the other so it was apparent that there were only three, and with a short laugh put them into his pocket. His eyes crinkled and he shrugged, without the least appearance of animosity. A touch of color actually came into the bristly cheeks of the bulldog. He had been prepared to bounce a kicker or trim a boob, but evidently a man who considered it a joke to be shortchanged was new to him.

"Cover charge?" asked Freeman.

"Hey?"

The man stared; the slit of his mouth twitched.

"You been around, huh?"

"I'm a hick," replied Freeman, "but I go down to New York now and then. It's all right."

Freeman became conscious that someone had come up beside him. And when he turned he found himself looking down into the eyes of the girl. Clear, dark amber they were; full of dark lights and clear depths into which a man might look until he became giddy and lost himself.

Freeman had expected to see some coarseness at close view, but there was none. A hard delicacy in her face; muscular strength in her beautifully formed body.

When she spoke it was not in the meaning tone of a girl trying to make up to him. Her words rang clear and cool, with a certain dignity.

"Good-evening," she said. "Would you like to dance? I'm hostess."

For a little sting of seconds Freeman gazed down into her eyes, caring not at all how much of what he felt was in his face. He had been given the gift of frankness, and a rare freedom from false shame.

"I don't dance well enough to dance with you," he told her, evenly, "but I'd like to buy you something to eat or drink, if you want it."

She hesitated, while a little line

appeared between her eyes. Then, with a gesture to the man at the counter, she turned toward the table where Freeman had been sitting.

"A lemonade, Slugger," she said, and leaned her elbows on the table, while Freeman handed a dollar over the bar and asked for ginger ale.

As he sat down he saw a little man scuttle like a rat around one end of the counter and pass behind the one called "Slugger." This little fellow came working down toward their end, busy with aimless movements among the pop bottles and boxes of cigarettes on the shelves; a very undersized man, with big, protruding ears and pale eyes set flush in a face which receded from cheek bones to Adam's apple.

"They want to find out who I am," said Freeman to the girl, with mild amusement. "That little weasel that's just come behind the bar is listening to me now!"

Two small dots of light appeared in the amber recesses of her eyes; an interest which had been wholly impersonal changed, and for the first time a hint of friendliness came into her manner.

"Tip got that!" she smiled. "That's Tip Downey, handy man. Slugger Mack heard it, too, and you almost got a grin out of him. He hates Tip. Who are you, anyway? I'll bite!"

"Nobody," replied Freeman. "Wood jobber—logger. I used to like the Three Finger House years ago, but I don't come often now. Maybe they took me for a trooper in plain clothes."

"No, but you look like a judge of the county court, or something. District attorney's office, perhaps?"

"And called you over to find out?" he asked."

The interest in her eyes glowed and deepened, and she laughed lightly.

"That's it! I'm a good pumper, if a man falls for me. You must have said something."

"I asked the prize pit dog there who the girl was that just danced."

"And the Slugger heard that!" she giggled. "I believe you wanted him to!"

"I didn't care," replied Freeman, calmly and truthfully. "I wasn't thinking about him."

"No?"

She studied him intently.

"You're the first man since I came up here that hasn't given me the heebie-jeebies!"

"New York?" smiled Freeman.

"Yes. But there's money up here."

"I see. But you can dance like—like a dream! I've been in New York. They don't come any better!"

He noted the quick veiling of her eyes at his flare of interest. She looked away, meditatively.

"I'm good, but independent. There's more money for me up here."

FREEMAN took out his pipe and filled it from a big, folding leather pouch. The girl suddenly leaned forward, and with dainty fingers touched the pipe.

"That's London!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, it's a good make. I run to pipes more than to clothes."

She regarded him speculatively, and the same slim fingers beat a tattoo upon the table. Freeman drew at his pipe and a wisp of smoke curled over the table toward her. She sniffed.

"Imported tobacco, too!" she murmured. "And you a native!"

"There's all kinds of natives," he told her, with the crinkles deepening around his eyes. "I don't hide what I make under the mattress."

She smiled at him again, and a little chill crept around his heart, for this was the kind of a smile he had

not wanted to see. She was being calculatingly agreeable. And half a minute before he had thought she was just a little taken with him for his own sake! Still he smoked on, outwardly imperturbable, watching the amber eyes.

"This is a good place to get rid of money that hurts your pocket!" she exclaimed softly.

"Yes," agreed Freeman, "I know it and—I'm going to come again!"

"To get rid of it?" she laughed. "You must hate your roll!"

"To see you!"

"Oh!"

Surprise, amusement, and a flash of some other emotion chased each other across her face.

"Well, come!"

Then her eyes clouded swiftly and Freeman looked up to see standing beside them the sleek man who had been sitting with the girl. He placed him now from description as Jerry Braithe, the proprietor of the roadhouse. The man was getting a little stomach under that smooth, well-cut waistcoat. His fingers, moving nervously against each other at his sides, had highly polished nails. Freeman met his eyes and gave him stare for stare.

"Peg," said Braithe, "they want another dance."

"All right, Jerry!"

She rose slowly, passed and smiled down upon Hugh Freeman with a movement of her hand as he started to get up.

"Sit down, big man! I'll see you again!"

She was gone, skimming out upon the floor which had been deserted for her.

Freeman met the gaze of Braithe again; for an appreciable length of time the faintly amused blue eyes stared into the hard black ones.

"Have a drink, Braithe?"

"No! Oh, you're Hugh Freeman, the logger?"

"Yes."

"Ah!"

From flat uncordiality the voice of the roadhouse proprietor became tinged with a slight trace of respect.

"Glad to see you, of course."

"Thanks," said Freeman dryly, and Braithe moved away with the appearance of having something to do elsewhere.

There was a presence at Freeman's elbow, and the weasel man was scouring the table. He bent far over it and spoke out of the corner of his mouth, without turning eyes or head.

"Look out!" he whispered. "Dat's Jerry's goil!"

SIX WEEKS later Hugh Freeman drove his roadster up to the blaring, red-eyed Three Finger House, standing like a smoky lantern in the night. He parked skillfully between the woodpile and what had been the horse-barn, locked the transmission, and made sure there was nothing worth stealing in the pockets.

He switched off the headlights, which had been playing against the weathered clapboards of the old building, and leaned back against the cushions.

The stars came nearer to him; and the darkly beautiful outlines of the mountains, sweeping in freedom and power against the deep sky.

Of the evenings of the past six weeks he had spent fully half here, more or less in the company of Peg Marvel and in association with that motley, whirling group of human beings who centered in the long room with the oilcloth-covered counter, where the bar had been.

He had learned a great many things about some of them, and about himself. He was a little tired. But that strength which had carried him to victory when all his small fortune

was risked on one foaming, cursing log drive now held him to his purpose.

Out of the shadows near the house a darker shadow flitted, like a rat scurrying in a dim corner. Freeman knew the form for that of Tip Downey before the little man spoke, which he did in a hissing whisper and at a distance that made him secure against a surprise attack from the car.

"That you, Freeman?"

"Yes."

He came closer, leaning over the door to make sure that it was indeed Hugh Freeman. He wore, even in the starlight, his impression of slinking mystery.

"Get me right," he whispered, with a hand shielding one side of his mouth, "and don't get sore! Peg's framin' to pull out and ditch youse, unless——"

"Unless—what?" after a pause.

"Unless it's fixed so she can't, see?"

Downey was still holding himself poised, ready to leap away, but so long did Freeman remain silent and motionless there against the cushions of the driver's seat that the weasel relaxed.

"What makes you tip me off, Downey?"

"Say! Don't you want to be put wise, huh?"

"They call me 'the big boob.' I've known it from the first night. Is that all you've got to say, Tip?"

"Well, I'll——"

Downey whistled his astonishment in a low, restrained breath.

"What's your game, anyway? If you ain't fell for the skoit, what's the game? Say, you ain't—you know the D. A., huh?"

"I know the district attorney, Jim Baldwin—yes. But you're wrong, Tip. I come here on my own business, and not for him. What are you looking for, a piece of change?"

"Aw, what's the use!"

"I thought that was it. You wanted to pull down a few hundred."

"You'll get it good!" said Downey venomously as he backed away from the car. "And I'll be damn glad when you do!"

"Run along!" laughed Freeman. "You can't tell me any news about the Three Finger House!"

WHEN Downey had vanished, muttering to himself, Freeman got slowly out of the car and with deliberate steps went into the building. The Slugger nodded grimly from behind the counter. The cold stare of Braithe struck across the room without a sign of greeting. Braithe hated him now.

It was a minute or two before Peg, dancing with a patron, saw him. She smiled quickly and, with a laughing excuse to her partner, came lightly to Freeman.

"How's the big man tonight?" she asked, as she sat down at a table in a corner between the counter and the door which they had made particularly their own.

"Right enough, Peg."

Freeman reached into his pocket and drew out an envelope, thick between his fingers.

"Here's the rest of the price of the car you wanted. I had to pull some money out of a lot of lumber I'd bought before I could get all of it. It's a little slow getting cash, sometimes."

She gave an exclamation of pleasure and stared down at the envelope held tightly between her hands. A moment of silence, with the line between her eyes that came when she was disturbed. She looked up. The smile with which she had greeted him was gone and in its place was a look of wonder. She searched his face.

"What for, Hugh?" she asked. "It's a lot of money that you've given me

every time I've—well—said I'd like anything. Why?"

"Why, do you think?"

He leaned back, letting his broad shoulders sag in order to better master his soul, and keep it steadfast to the purpose that was in him.

Hew to the line—to the line with every stroke!

"There could be lots of reasons!"

"Maybe it's because I like to give you things!"

"Oh!"

Her fingers twisted against each other, and suddenly she laughed recklessly. She flung her head back with the gesture that he knew so well, as though she were flinging away some thought that she did not want.

"If you must get rid of it, I might as well take it!"

"Yes."

He smiled at her, turning the glass in front of him around and around upon the table. Her eyes shifted, troubled, and fell upon Slugger Mack.

Freeman saw that at a sign from him she started and the blood left her lips. A movement of her body; fingers drummed.

"Jerry's coming!"

She threw the words across the table in a very low voice. "In spite—oh, I don't want anything to happen to you!"

Freeman laughed and began to fill his pipe with slow, steady fingers. He did it without affectation, and merely because he liked to smoke in times of excitement.

"Braithe won't do anything to me," he said. "The Slugger gave you warning just now?"

"How did you know?"

"I've learned that he talks with those polished eyes of his; and he hates Braithe, just as Braithe hates him; and they both fear Downey."

"Why do they fear him?" she breathed tensely, leaning forward and looking into his eyes. "That's one of the things I don't know!"

"All of it's none of my business," said Freeman. "I come here to see you."

"You know more than I do!"

She drew in a deep breath.

"Thank heaven, it'll be a clean-up soon, and——"

"And what?"

"Oh—nothing."

"It may be over without a clean-up, Peg!"

"You wouldn't squeal?"

Swift suspicion flamed in her face; small hands clenched into fists.

"Peg," said Freeman soberly, "I couldn't come to the Three Finger House as much as I have and not know that Braithe's the agent up here near the border for a big bootlegger, routing cars and fixing things generally. I tell you the truth when I say that I'll have nothing to do with it, one way or the other!"

She sank back in her chair, with limp hands, a little ashamed and more than a little puzzled.

"I never can make you out," she said. "You come and sit and talk to me, and give me hundreds! Yes, it's two or three thousand now! What's your game, big man?"

"Tip Downey asked me that tonight!"

"Well, what is it?"

"I haven't any game, Peg," he told her sadly.

"Blah! Everybody's got a game!"

"Of course there are two ways of looking at it. I—like you—pretty well!"

She shook her head slowly, and the half curling, coppery hair swung in the lamplight.

"I never heard of anybody who didn't want to get something!"

"Maybe I want to get you to like me!"

"Ha!" Her white teeth flashed in

a smile; then she frowned. "You can't buy it!"

"I don't want to buy anything!"

"You *are* a big boob!" she cried, in an instant of utter frankness.

Freeman winced and pulled himself together in a flash.

Steady—hew to the line!

The shadow of the presence of Braithe was falling across him. He could feel it before he looked up into the man's face. The Slugger must have stalled him off somehow in the hope that Peg would leave Freeman.

"Come outside a minute, Freeman," said Braithe.

"Jerry!" gasped Peg.

"Shut up!" snarled Braithe.

"Don't worry, Peg!" said Freeman with a grim laugh. "Glad to go with you, Braithe!"

AT THE doorway he caught Jerry Braithe quickly by the elbow, iron fingers sinking into nerve and tendon, and the roadhouse-keeper went ahead. But there was no ambush, as Freeman had feared, and under the stars Braithe whirled and faced him, with one hand at his hip.

"Damn you!" he whispered. "I've got a good mind to plug you now!"

"You couldn't get away with it," said Freeman. "Your drag wont work here!"

"Well, you get into that car of yours and beat it! Don't come back, or I'll have the Slugger kick your face to pieces! Understand? Keep away from Peg or the troopers'll find you side of the road some morning!"

"Braithe," said Freeman steadily, "listen to me a minute, and think hard. You're routing your cars down through Hamilton county and telling your boss it's because the troopers are so thick at Warrensburg and Chestertown and Lake George! That's not the reason! You send 'em over those back roads so Slugger Mack's hijackers can stick 'em up! You double-cross your boss and split with the Slugger!

"And you've got a couple of gunmen that take a car away from the Slugger's men every few days! That's mostly all clear money and no comeback! You're double-crossing Mack, too, and he suspects it. What do you think he'd do if I told him a few things? Better let me alone, and Peg!"

"You—you big hick!"

Braithe actually staggered a step, all his arrogance gone like a bubble.

"Downey's squealed! I wish I'd croaked him!"

"Tip didn't tell me. And Peg doesn't know you're a double-crosser!"

"Downey knows too much!" muttered Braithe.

"And so do I!" laughed Freeman. "But I'm safe, if you don't bother me!"

"Oh, hell!" shouted Braithe. "There's more girls!"

"And if you get me blackjacked, tell 'em to make a good job of it," said Freeman, "for if they don't I'll put you in the hospital!"

"Forget Slugger, that's all I ask!" exclaimed Braithe.

And for the first time since Freeman had known the man he detected a note of fear in his voice.

"I'll take care of that little rat, Downey!"

"Be careful!" warned Freeman. "I think I like him less than I do you! He's a disease!"

"For a fall guy, you certainly are wise!" exclaimed Braithe. "Say, what's your game with Peg, anyway?"

"I haven't got any game," replied Freeman slowly, with the sure knowledge that he would not be believed.

"Tell that to the suckers!" laughed Braithe bitterly. "Well, let's go inside. I don't like this cussed country after dark!"

HOOF-BEATS coming up from the distance along the hard road. That was the impression of the Three Finger House upon Hugh Freeman. By and by, soon now, something would crash into view; something horrible. That triangle of treachery and hatred could end in no other way. And he began to wonder whether the structure of his own hope would not be pulled shuddering down in the smash. Steady! Stand fast and firm!

Freeman had lived long and deeply enough to know that his power over fate lay in the thinking of thoughts and not in the doing of things.

This night he made his monotonous entrance to the Three Finger House and sat down in the monotonously same company; here and there a lumberjack, young would-be sports of the mountains with their girls, a few hard-faced drivers of hooch cars.

A few days had passed since his defiance of Jerry Braithe, and Jerry had greeted him invariably with a mechanical quirk of the mouth—outward neutrality as the price of safety from Slugger Mack. Freeman did not doubt that he would do what he could under the surface.

Now Tip Downey appeared with his ratlike locomotion and polished the special table between the bar and the door. The side of his mouth toward Freeman began to give utterance to low, hoarse words.

"Youse got a last chance," he said. "Peg's going to beat it unless I ditch her for youse, see? The Slugger's got the goods on Braithe and Jerry's going to try to pull his freight. I'm the spotter for the big boss and I take care of Jerry! Right, too! What say, bo? Want Peg ditched here? I'm telling youse—she makes a getaway tonight!"

Under the impact of the news, Freeman shifted slightly in his chair, lifted his eyes and gazed slantingly under his brows at the expectant face above him — rabbit waiting for a piece of lettuce.

"How much, Tip?"

Freeman read the instant of calculation. How much would the big boob stand? A beady glance; and the slightly moving lips again.

"Slip me a grand, boss. Peg's worth another thousand, huh?"

"Go to the devil, Tip!"

And Freeman chuckled frankly into the face that slowly took on a greenish-yellow cast as the rebuff sank in. The upper lip of Downey lifted and a brown tooth threatened Freeman with triple-distilled hatred.

"You'll get yours!"

He was gone, sliding around behind the counter and the imperturbable Slugger. Again he was outwardly the combination of rat and rabbit that he seemed ordinarily. But Hugh Freeman knew that he had made an enemy ten times more to be feared than either Braithe or Slugger Mack. Poisonous little spy! Never mind.

Hew to the line! He could have accepted that offer and seen to it that Downey delivered. But that was not what he wanted. Not that.

Peg came into the room and saw him. She wore a dark, fur-trimmed dress and little silver-buckled slippers. Never more different than she was this night, and never more beautiful to the eyes of Freeman.

She was the woman he had carried in the back of his mind always; the woman he had scarcely hoped to find in the flesh. He had found her here! What a joke!

FOR the first time since he had known her the gay little laugh was absent. Her face was white and troubled as she came over and sat down. From the other side of the room Braithe nodded toward the dance floor, but she shook her head, scowling.

To one who knew what was going

on beneath the surface, it was apparent that things were slipping on this the last night of the Three Finger House.

"Hello, Hugh!" said Peg listlessly.

"Here's the money for the fur coat you wanted."

Freeman gave her another of those envelopes.

"I drove into Plattsburg yesterday and found an Alaska seal that I think you'd like. Seven hundred and fifty. But you said you wanted to get it yourself."

"Yes."

Her fingers trembled slightly against the crackling paper.

"I'll get it soon."

"I might drive you up there."

"Yes."

"Haven't bought your car yet?"

"No, not yet."

Her eyes slipped away from his; clouded amber this evening.

"I will pretty soon."

"Do what you like," said Hugh with great gentleness in his voice. "It would be nice to see you enjoy some of these things I've tried to give you."

"I will."

She flung her hair back. Some obscure thought drew her lips tightly together.

"Tonight I'm worried. Slugger and Jerry had words. Jerry drew a gun and stood him off."

"I wonder you don't pull out of it! You could!"

"Hugh!" she exclaimed suddenly.

Her eyes became misty with tears. If she had understood his suggestion she gave no sign.

"Will you dance with me just once, now?"

"Why——" Freeman was astonished, but his little smile of pleasure played around his eyes. "I've always wanted to, but I thought I'd be too clumsy."

THEY went around the room in that close, fantastic rhythm which is the dance of these years; and during this time Hugh Freeman very nearly lost that balance which he had maintained from the evening when he first looked at Peg Marvel and knew that he had met Fate.

His arm held her body close to his own. Her hand lay delicately in his. He wanted to swing her clear of the floor, up and into the night, with the powerful roadster humming clear of the Three Finger House and all that was in it.

"We've danced together," she murmured, when they sat down again.

He heard farewell tolling through her words.

"Yes."

Again he was steady; his self-command and his purpose enthroned again, side by side. Peg's gaze was clear now; hard, sad, settled to a consideration of things not present.

Freeman began to take note of what was going on about them in the room; tonight he was tuned to a super-sensitiveness. He judged that Braithe had planned to make his break late, or early, after the closing of the roadhouse. Before that would something happen? Probably. What? Unless something did happen before the last patron left and the lights went out, Hugh Freeman felt that he would lose Peg—unless he wanted to take up Tip Downey's offer.

WITHOUT warning, he became conscious of the electric feeling that sometimes comes over a man just before a fight starts. His head swung away from the silent, meditative girl. The people in the room were the same as always. Slugger Mack was handing out one of those tiny thimbles of brown liquid that passed for whisky. Where was Braithe, Downey?

Suddenly from somewhere in the

recesses of the Three Finger House came a scream. It was not a little, half-serious feminine shriek such as was often heard there. This was a scream wrung from the depths of a soul in mortal agony. It poisoned the room with the broad advertisement of torture and death; hung in the air for a deadly second like a breath of evil and died away, leaving pale lips and staring, questioning eyes.

Slugger Mack took something from under the oilcloth-covered counter and went out of the room with swift and yet deliberately careful steps. Peg blanched; her eyes asked Freeman what it was. He had stiffened at the sound, for he knew that it meant a killing.

As the girl started to get up he put his hand upon her shoulder and crushed her into the chair.

"Stay where you are!" he barked.

A few of those in the room had risen. They began to mill slowly as panicky humans do. Some of the wiser, or more timid, took themselves swiftly out into the safety of the night.

The two or three lumberjacks sat tight, grimly, tossing off their drinks. Nothing could happen there of which they had not seen the like before; and they craved excitement. The music had stopped, with a discord crashing from the piano. The room hummed like a distant swarm of bees.

Over the threshold of the doorway which led deeper into the house a face appeared. Freeman saw it, probably before anyone else, and stared fascinated.

For a moment he could not understand why the face of Tip Downey should come out of the dim lit interior like that, moving snail-like a scant two feet above the worn and dirty boards of the floor.

Glittering with drops of perspiration, livid, twisted of mouth, for an instant it hung against the dark background like a face without neck or body.

Then Downey pitched into the room and rolled over on his back, with the handle of a butcher-knife sticking up just above the neckband of his shirt.

Peg moaned, gripping the table.

Another woman cried out ringingly.

But before any man in the room could make a movement another figure came through that same dark doorway—Jerry Braithe, leaping as though devils were loosed upon his trail. He cleared Downey's body and struck straight across the room for the front door, with his white face yearning toward that battered portal as toward a city of refuge.

Three crashing reports, so near together that they seemed to run into each other.

Braithe bounded clear of the floor, clutched the reeking air of his roadhouse for a support which was not there, and plunged forward with his polished nails setting themselves against the waxed surface, where the feet of the dancers had moved.

His body drew together a little; sagged to rest.

Just beyond Downey stood Slugger Mack with an automatic pistol hanging ready in his hand.

A little bluish haze drifted in front of him.

His eyes snapped over the room and found no hand there ready to raise itself against him. He began to walk toward the door, watchful, alert, with the pistol swinging warningly.

Peg Marvel stood up; her head flung back.

The pistol whipped her way, with the muzzle raised.

"Sit down, Peg!" commanded Freeman, and when she did not heed he reached out under the eyes of the Slugger and forced her down.

"She's going to ditch you tonight!" sneered the Slugger, as he passed them. "You big boob!"

Peg stiffened under the grip of Freeman. Her glance went to the still form on the floor.

Now the Slugger was within six feet of the doorway, his back half turned toward them as he faced the others in the room and moved toward freedom.

Freeman took his hand from Peg and put it against the table. He vaulted over it easily, and, before Slugger Mack could turn at the thud of his step, he held elbow and wrist of the pistol hand in an iron grip.

Backward and up, and the Slugger pitched over with his right arm doubled along his spine in a hammerlock. The automatic slid to the floor. Freeman put a knee against his heaving form and looked up into the face of a State trooper.

"He's just killed a man," said Freeman quietly.

Slugger Mack was handcuffed. Sullen but self-possessed they stood him against the counter where he had served impassively these months. There were three troopers and, to the surprise of Freeman, the district attorney, Baldwin, was with them.

IN the face of Jim Baldwin was written the history of a long war between natural kindliness and hard experience with human nature.

Hands behind his back, he walked from Braithe to Downey and back to Freeman; while those in the room, at a warning from the troopers, remained in whispering suspense.

Baldwin flung a glance at Peg, sitting with fingers locked and head bowed over the table. He looked at Hugh Freeman, and shrugged and drew a long breath.

"That little stool pigeon, Downey, got me over here tonight, Hugh," he said. "Had a grudge, or something on his mind. Wanted to have Braithe arrested. Wanted pay for squealing. Bah! They make me sick, all of 'em! What do you know about it?"

Freeman told him what he had heard and seen.

Baldwin thought for a few minutes, and again and again his glance returned to the bowed, copper head of Peg.

"Well, I'll hold her as a material witness and let the rest of 'em go when they've been checked up. You'll have to testify, of course."

Suddenly the white face of Peg was lifted. Tortured eyes stared at them. She leaped to her feet, panting, with knuckles pressed desperately against the table to support her.

"Hold me?" she whispered. "Do you mean in jail? Oh, *no!* I've never been in jail. I can't stand it. I haven't done anything! Ask the big man! Hugh! Tell him!"

"She's out of it, Jim," said Freeman. "It was a three-cornered feud between the men, and that's straight!"

The district attorney looked into the eyes of his friend, and then at the girl. No words were needed to tell that he knew Hugh Freeman had been hard hit by the entertainer at the Three Finger House. His face softened; grew a little sad.

"I've got to hold her, Hugh! I'll ask for ten thousand bail. That's the very best I can do. I need her, and if she puts up that much she won't beat it. Sorry to talk like that, old man, but it's my job!"

"I—he—Jerry had taken what I had! I haven't ten thousand!"

Her hands reached toward Freeman uncertainly.

"Oh, Hugh! Jail!"

"Bah!" Slugger Mack growled, with a clink of bracelets. "Braithe trimmed 'em all, and planted it somewhere! I went t'roo 'im before he busted loose from me! It ain't in his clo'es!"

"You see, Hugh," said Baldwin, "there's a snarl here. I'll want her!"

PEG raised faltering hands to her eyes and held them there. Her lips moved, but no words came.

"It's all right, Peg," said Freeman.

He stepped nearer and patted her shoulder.

Her arms snapped down to her sides and she stared at him, speechless, half incredulous.

"I'll be——"

The Slugger muttered and cursed to himself; and now Freeman realized that he hated Peg, for a reason which a man could guess easily.

"Say, you fall guy! She's trimmed you and I can prove she was leaving tonight! Got her railroad ticket on her! She'll jump bail!"

"Don't do it, Hugh!"

The district attorney shook his head.

"Don't be a fool! She'll jump it, sure! Ten thousand would just about clean you out!"

"Yes, I'd be cleaned out!"

"Hugh!" Peg swayed toward him; caught herself.

Steady! Hew to the line. What was it he had been trying to do all these weeks past?

Freeman filled his lungs and unconsciously his shoulders went back. The smile that was peculiarly his own played for an instant about his eyes.

"I'll do it, Peg. Don't worry!"

Peg's flimsy little handkerchief had come into her hands from somewhere. At his words it tore across. She choked upon a sob, and the terror was wiped from her eyes. The clouds went away from their depths and stars came out in them, stars drenched and brightened by tears. Her chin lifted and she stood erect before them all.

"No!" she cried.

Her voice rang in the tense stillness of the room. Frantic fingers ripped at her dress. Envelopes, half a dozen of them, slid in a careless heap upon the table.

"There it is, Hugh! All you've given me! Four thousand, I guess. Take it back! It's true, big man. I was going tonight. Oh, fool! Don't go bail for me, Hugh! I'm going to jail! It's all I can do to show you—oh, God!"

She sank down to her chair, sobbing, with round arms flung out across the scarred table. Her face hid itself in their shelter. Hugh Freeman forgot that there was anyone else in the world. Peg and himself! The glory of victory. He raised tight fists to the smoke grimed ceiling.

"I win, God!" he laughed.

A step nearer to the table; his hand rested upon the tossed and shaken hair.

"Come, Peg! We've got to get a special license and hunt up a minister!"

"What—what?"

She looked up, tear cleansed and beautiful. "Hugh! You don't —*want to marry me?*"

"I've been hunting for you a long time."

He smiled his smile down upon her; and it was like a light shining upon her face.

"A long time hunting, for Peg!"

Sinister House

By CHARLES G. BOOTH

A FOUR PART STORY—PART III

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

GAIL HOLLISTER, assistant in the Westcoast Museum, Los Angeles, is on her way to Colonel Conniston's house, Casa de Ayer, to undertake the work of cataloging the Colonel's famous collection of intaglios, when she intercepts the hold-up of John Gill and his son, Victor, prominent Los Angeles dealers in diamonds and precious gems. They are returning from a visit to Colonel Conniston, after making him an offer for his most famous intaglios.

The "highwayman" is Kerry O'Neil, a devil-may-care and apparently desperate man whom Gail has known through her connection with the Westcoast Museum. He disappears the moment Gail arrives on the scene.

When she reaches Casa de Ayer, she meets Colonel Conniston; later still, thinking of the hold-up and of Kerry O'Neil, she is unable to sleep, and sees someone stalking suspiciously about the grounds. She goes downstairs and finds that the Colonel has been murdered.

Dimity, the houseman, and Mrs. Wessels, the housekeeper, are roused by Gail's exciting discovery, and while Dimity notifies the authorities, Kerry O'Neil mysteriously enters the house. Gail is puzzled and alarmed at his presence and pleads with him to escape. He takes her advice, but she is later grilled by the sheriff, who suspects O'Neil.

When Gail meets Norman Stark, Conniston's nephew, she distrusts him, and Mrs. Wessels identifies him as the man who was slinking about the grounds. Gail believes the murderer entered and left the house through some secret passage-way.

After the inquest, the Gills, Stark and Bartlett and his men apparently leave Casa de Ayer and Gail takes food to Kerry O'Neil, who is hiding in the caves along the beach. Kerry tells her that years ago Conniston and his father had collected the intaglios; that his father did not want the jewels and when the father died and he, Kerry, found himself in need of money, he decided to demand his share of the value of the intaglios. The Gills had come to make Conniston an offer, and, fearing that Conniston had sold the gems and that he would be cheated, Kerry had decided to hold-up the Gills.

He tells Gail he is going to try to get into the library at Casa de Ayer to hunt for clues. Gail tries to dissuade him, but in spite of the additional intervention of Decker, the detective, Kerry reaches the library accompanied by Gail. They find the combination to the vault and, opening it, find that the intaglios are gone.

Norman Stark comes in and Kerry disappears behind the curtain, but as Stark begins to make unwelcome remarks to Gail, Kerry appears and knocks him out. A moment or two later Bartlett comes in, Gail switches off the lights and Kerry escapes with Gail's assistance, by way of the cellars and a trap-door that leads into a tunnel in the rock, upon which Casa de Ayer was built.

CHAPTER XIV

GREEN LIGHTS

GAIL saw her own thought reflected in Kerry's excited eyes.

"This is the way the man that killed Conniston got in and out of the house!" he cried.

"Stark!"

"If it was Stark."

"Of course it was, Kerry! He came through the grounds, climbed down the summer-house trail—that's the quickest way to the beach—and came up through here! He went back the same way."

Gail was on fire with the implication she found in their discovery.

"Don't you see?—Bartlett will have

to find a new theory. Dimity is out of it. Anyone might have done it! Oh, Kerry, what luck!"

Kerry nodded slowly.

"Probably Stark knows of the trap. But so will Dimity. Don't be too sure Dimity is out of it, Gail. He knows a thing or two, I'm positive."

"You seem to have forgotten that Mrs. Wessels and I saw Stark in the grounds!" Gail reminded him impatiently.

She refused to admit even to herself that the unfavorable conditions under which she and Mrs. Wessels had seen Stark were reason enough for Kerry's opinion that they might be mistaken.

The murmur of voices in the room above terminated this pointless argument. Gail stared down into the black pit at her feet, shuddering.

"It looks terrible, Kerry. You are not afraid to try it?"

Kerry chuckled again.

"Leave it to me, dear." Then his face sobered. "It means leaving you alone," he muttered in troubled tones. "Bartlett will be raging."

"Let him rage. You promised, Kerry, and you are going!" She pointed to the trap. "This is new evidence. Bartlett has to consider it. Don't worry about me. I can take care of myself."

His hands fell on her shoulders. He looked at her silently for a moment; then he drew her into his arms.

"You are great, Gail!" he mumbled, brokenly. "I'm not worth it!"

He pressed her hands until she could have cried out with the pain of it. Then he set his foot on the ladder and went down into the darkness. His face flashed up at her before it vanished from sight and she had to press her hands to her lips to stifle the cry that rose to them. She thought of the cavern as some prehistoric monster that had swallowed him up.

He had no matches, the cavern was in pitch darkness; he knew nothing of the way through it. In terror Gail knelt by the trap and listened. Momentarily she expected to hear a cry and the thud of a fallen body. She heard neither. The small noises of his descent came to her faintly. A match flickered, went out.

"Kerry!" she called.

"All right!" His response came to her clearly.

A minute passed.

"Kerry!" she called again.

"All right!" Less distinctly this time.

The noises of his descent grew fainter. She lost them altogether.

"Kerry!" she called for the third time, as loud as she dared.

If he made reply, she did not hear it.

Voices at the head of the cellar stairs roused Gail to action. Every second she could delay Bartlett and his men would count in Kerry's favor.

She sprang up, closed the door, and looked around the cellar for some means of barricading it. Her eyes fell on one of the lockers which Kerry had concluded contained part of Conniston's private stock.

She found it heavier than she had expected, however, and at first she could not move it. But the tramp of feet on the cellar steps spurred her on to fresh endeavor and she tugged at the locker again until her arms threatened to spring out of their sockets.

It moved; sluggishly it crawled across the floor. The men were running about in the larger cellar now, rattling the outer door, shaking the three windows. Every second she expected the grind of the locker on the floor to betray her. Another yard. . . another . . . another foot. . . . It was done!

Now she let down the trap and turned out the light. There was nothing else she could do. Blindly she

groped her way to one of the other lockers and collapsed upon it—physically and spiritually exhausted.

Her body hung limply; she felt weak and ill; a fog of depression rolled over her spirits. The atmosphere of the cellar stifled her. It was like a hand upon her throat.

One of the men in the outer cellar shouted; feet thundered across the floor, a line of light sprang along the bottom of the door and the door was shaken violently.

"Open up," Bartlett roared, "or we'll smash it in!"

Gail did not move.

Someone put his shoulder to the door. It creaked and groaned, but the locker did not stir. A body was hurled against it. The locker moved a little and a slit of light showed in the tiny opening that had been made.

Again the door was assaulted; and again and again.

Each time the locker gave a little until, at last, the opening was wide enough to permit the entrance of a man.

Bartlett was the first inside. The eye of his torch fled around the musty interior, lighted on Gail's head; circled the cellar again. Then it bore down upon Gail, a malignant eye, demanding an accounting.

"Where is O'Neil?" the deputy roared.

Gail shut her eyes against the blinding glare of the torch, pressed her lips thinly together, and said nothing. She was thinking:

"Every second will count. They have lights and Stark will be familiar with the cavern. On the other hand, Kerry has five minutes start and he should be more at home on the beach than they."

Yes, he had a chance.

Bartlett seized her savagely by the arm.

"You hear me! Where is O'Neil?"

She did not answer. His fingers dug into her flesh like talons of steel.

Stark had just entered, torch in hand. He was swollen of lip and sullen of eye, and he glared at Gail balefully. Peters and another man were behind him. Both of them carried torches and the light of Peters' torch circled around the ring in the trap-door. His shout brought them crowding around him.

As he lifted the trap Stark gave a cry of amazement.

"I never saw this before!" he shouted thickly.

So he intended to pretend ignorance of the trap-door! was Gail's quick thought. But he would, of course.

Bartlett cast the beam of his torch into the black depths at his feet and recklessly dropped down the ladder. Stark and Peters followed close behind him.

GAIL dragged herself to the trap and stared down into the cavern below, shivering a little. Stark had vanished behind a bend in the rock wall; but the other two were still in sight and, by the light of their torches, Gail got a sort of photographic impression of broad, shallow steps roughly hewn out of the gray sandstone rock on the right side of the split.

They swiftly followed Barlett around the bend and Gail became aware of the fact that she was alone again.

Just then she remembered her appointment with Dimity in the summer-house.

The events of the last hour had been so swift and furious in their passage that she had completely forgotten it. She glanced at her wrist watch. It was midnight. And Dimity had told her to be there at ten. The shooting would have brought him back to the house, running, she re-

flected. Probably he was upstairs now.

Dimity had intimated that he meant to tell her who had killed Colonel Conniston. But Gail was in a pessimistic mood and, as she passed wearily up the cellar steps, she had little hope of getting anything of value out of him.

Dimity's mind was unbalanced and it was too much to expect that his conclusions would be anything but a reflection of his mental disorder and consequently worthless.

However, if he did know anything she was going to have it out of him.

In the hall Gail ran into Mrs. Wessels in hair curlers and dressing-gown.

"Lord bless you, Miss 'Ollister!" the housekeeper exclaimed in relief. "Where 'ave you been? What is it, dearie? You look that poorly! And it's not to be wondered at, neither! What with all this shooting and shouting and men traipsing into a body's bedroom!"

Gail smiled wanly.

"I'll be all right presently. Have you seen Dimity?"

Mrs. Wessels stiffened. "That I 'aven't!" she exclaimed indignantly. "And I 'aven't seen this man O'Neil or got 'im hid in my bedroom as Bartlett let on he thought I 'ad, neither!"

Mrs. Wessels spread her hands eloquently, almost pathetically.

"I ask you, Miss 'Ollister, if it's decent to ask a respectable woman like me if she's 'iding a man in 'er bedroom? If poor Wessels 'ad been alive Bartlett would've been 'ash by this, let me tell you!"

"I am sure he would, and deservedly, too," Gail agreed feelingly. "But I didn't mean it that way. Is Dimity in the house?"

Mrs. Wessels was instantly mollified.

"I haven't seen 'im, dearie. Funny, isn't it? He must 'ave 'eard the shooting and all the racket they was making. I looked in his room, but he wasn't there. A funny oddity, Dimity, Miss 'Ollister!"

Gail nodded, then passed abruptly out into the patio, conscious of Mrs. Wessels' eyes following her disappointedly.

She hurried across the patio and came to the path that skirted the top of the cliff. Looking down upon the beach, she saw human forms racing along the moonlit sand and recognized Bartlett, Peters and Stark. They were stabbing at shadow and crevice with the beams of their torches.

Of Kerry she saw nothing whatever and a sigh of relief rose to her lips. He got out of the cavern safely, at any rate.

Her relief should have risen above every other emotion. But, oddly enough, it didn't. She was again conscious of that demoralizing sense of disaster which had been with her throughout this tremendous night.

It was suddenly intensified by the sight of Decker stumbling across the patio toward her, his hands still manacled in front of him.

The moonlight was full upon the man and Gail stood where she was for an instant, transfixed by the dark malevolence, the insensate rage in his face.

Then, with a terror she could not define leaping through her veins, she fled down the path to the summer-house.

Just then, far out at sea, a green light flamed. For perhaps three seconds it burned, then it went out, to reappear an instant later for another three seconds.

Again it flashed out and again it reappeared for approximately the same short length of time.

As she flew down the path, Gail saw the signal, if signal it was. But she was too overcome by her emotions

to reflect upon it. Besides, Dimity was in the summer-house waiting for her. She could see him sitting on one of the benches, his queer head flung back as if he were counting the stars.

Gail stepped onto the threshold of the summer-house, but she drew back as if an invisible hand barred her entrance. Then she went in, her eyes dilated with fear.

"Dimity!" she whispered. "Dimity!"

He did not speak.

"Dimity!" she cried in anguished tones. Dimity! Dimity! Dimity!"

Still he did not speak.

Gail put her hand on his; it was as cold as her own. She bent nearer, looked into his face; and then, with a scream, she fell back, white to the lips. Something seemed to snap within her as the cord of a stringed instrument snaps when it is too tightly strung.

Red lights blazed up before her eyes. No! they were green lights and they flashed to her messages which she could not understand.

Suddenly everything went black around her and she pitched forward on her face.

CHAPTER XV.

GRAY TWEED

WHEN Gail awoke the next morning the curtains were drawn back from the window and her room was brilliant with sunlight. For a moment she had to close her eyes again, so intense was the white light that played upon them.

She reopened them with a sense of spiritual exhaustion.

Into the space of a single hour she had compressed the emotional experiences of a lifetime. And she felt as if her return to consciousness were less an awakening than an escape from a place of shadows, weird and terrible, of grotesque and leering faces, into a world that was sane, clean and real.

She was exhausted. But her brain was clear, and she found herself calmly examining that sequence of events which had terminated with the finding of Dimity in the summer-house.

They had brought her back to the Casa de Ayer and carried her up to her room. She had a dim recollection of faces bending over her and of much spirited argument. One of the faces had stood between her and the others, as a wrathful guardian angel might stand. Dear loyal Mrs. Wessels! She had almost seen a flaming sword in her hand!

After that, there had been hours of nightmare and burning fever and Mrs. Wessels ministering to her continually. Toward dawn she had slept. And now she was awake again.

Her first thought was of Kerry. Had he managed to elude his pursuers? Her impression was that he had. And as she considered the pros and cons of the situation, recalling that the faces Mrs. Wessels had fended off from her had been red with anger, her impression became a certainty.

But where had Kerry gone? The peninsular was limited in extent. How long could he evade Bartlett and his men?

She began to think of Dimity. The little man's cold white face, his staring eyes, his queer gnome-like head flung back, just as she had seen him in the moonlight, moved across her vision so vividly real that she had to clench her hands and bite her lip to keep from screaming.

It meant, of course, that Dimity had had nothing to do with the death of his master, and that Stark alone had conceived and carried out the crime. It meant, also, that Dimity

somehow had discovered that Stark was guilty, that it was Stark who had overheard them in the patio, not Decker, as she had supposed; and that Stark had killed Dimity to still his tongue.

He had entered and left the house by way of the trap and relocked the vault to create in the minds of the police the impression that the affair was an "inside job."

The trap had been accidentally discovered and he had promptly denied all knowledge of it.

"The beast!" Gail cried passionately. Then, gently: "Poor Dimity!"

THE door opened just then, putting an end to Gail's meditations, and Mrs. Wessels entered, troubled of face, and laden with a tray, from which arose the aroma of coffee.

" 'Ow are you feeling, dearie?" she inquired tenderly over the top of the tray.

Gail wasn't sure just how she felt, but she contrived a smile of sorts. It brought an answering beam to Mrs. Wessels' honest face.

"Oh, better! Lots better!" she cried, a little unsteadily. "I wouldn't have been but for you, though!"

"It wasn't anything at all, Miss 'Ollister."

The housekeeper set the tray down upon a chair near the bed and took her reward in the form of a warm kiss planted on Gail's forehead.

"It's a pity to wake you at all, after the 'orrible night you've 'ad!" she went on indignantly. "I 'ad my time to keep that man Bartlett away from you after they brought you in from the summer-house, I can tell you! He got a piece of my mind, 'e did. But I can't hold 'im off any longer. He says he's coming up if you are not downstairs in ten minutes.

" 'Shame!' I said to 'im. 'And the young lady not out of 'er nightdress; Traipsing in and out of women's bedrooms without so much as a *by your leave* or anything!'

"But, 'e says he's coming, so you better get up. This is a real nice grapefruit, Miss 'Ollister, and here's a bit of 'ot toast and a poached egg done soft."

Gail accepted the tray.

"You are too good to me, Mrs. Wessels," she whispered. "Tell Bartlett I'll be down in ten minutes."

Gail took a spoonful of the sugared grapefruit. She wanted to ask Mrs. Wessels about Kerry, and about Dimity, but she was afraid to. She was afraid of the truth. There was something behind Mrs. Wessels' tender solicitude that was going to hurt her. Was there no limit to one's capacity for pain?

"Did Kerry O'Neil get away?" she found herself asking.

Mrs. Wessels folded her arms.

"Yes, Miss 'Ollister. He got away."

Gail's heart warmed a little. There was something else, though. She could feel it. The housekeper seemed to be waiting. Gail nibbled at a piece of the toast.

"Dimity is dead, Mrs. Wessels," she faltered.

"Yes, Miss 'Ollister. He's dead."

Gail was silent for a moment.

"Do you know anything about it?"

"Yes. His head was smashed in with a wrench or an iron bar or something, Bartlett said. Oh! Miss 'Ollister, it was horrible! I can't tell you!"

Mrs. Wessels' face crimsoned.

"If I could get my hands on the man that did for 'im!" she cried with a vigor of expression that was a revelation in character to Gail.

"Does Bartlett know who did it?" Gail whispered.

Mrs. Wessels looked down at her folded arms.

"He *said* 'e does, Miss 'Ollister."

"Who did he say—Stark?"

"No, 'e didn't say it was Mr. Stark, Miss 'Ollister."

Gail felt a sudden tightening at her throat. "Who, then?"

Mrs. Wessels put her arm about the girl's shoulders.

"Now, don't ask me that, dearie!"

"Tell me!" Gail cried fiercely.

Mrs. Wessels' round face was quivering.

"If you will 'ave it, then. Bartlett said it was this Kerry O'Neil. Now don't take on about it, there's a brave girl!"

The housekeeper's arm tightened around Gail and she sat on the bed beside her. But Gail was not "taking on." She was taking it quietly: just a sudden clenching of her hands and a blazing of light in her eyes.

"It was't Kerry, Mrs. Wessels," she said calmly. "He couldn't have done it. You must believe in him, as I do!" Her voice rose passionately. "I couldn't bear it if you thought he had! You must stand by me. I've no one else." Gail was weeping now.

Mrs. Wessels stroked her hair.

"I'm not going back on you, dearie! Don't you say that to me! 'Ave a good cry—it'll do you a world of good. I don't think Mr. O'Neil did it. His 'Ighness, Norman Stark, hasn't explained 'imself yet. It upset me so, Dimity going that way. That's all. Dimity was queer, but a good sort for all of 'is watching and listening. I'm bothered about 'is urn. We'll 'ave to do something with it. He hasn't a soul."

"We'll have to take care of it," Gail found herself saying mechanically.

She passed the tray back to Mrs. Wessels.

"It's lovely, but I can't eat a thing. Later on, perhaps. Tell Bartlett I'm coming."

AS Gail hurried into her clothes she came to a decision. Nothing had been gained by withholding from Bartlett such of the facts of the case as he had not already discovered. Kerry would have been infinitely better off had he given himself up at first, as he had wanted to. Gail arrived at this conclusion, reproaching herself bitterly for advising him otherwise; but Dimity's death had demonstrated its truth, for now Kerry was in a worse fix than ever.

She had determined to tell Bartlett everything: of the history of the Conniston intaglios, of Kerry's interest in them, of his reception by Conniston, of their quarrel, of the motive behind the hold-up, and of Dimity's "watching and listening."

Just what effect her belated frankness would have on Bartlett she did not know, but Kerry was too deeply involved to suffer by it.

Bartlett was in the library impatiently awaiting her. He sat at the table. Behind him stood Decker, sullen of face. He got rid of the handcuffs, but his wrists were badly swollen.

Stark nonchalantly held his old position by the window. The coolness of the man staggered Gail. He dared to stand there, insolently appraising her! With deep satisfaction she noticed that his mouth was swollen and that he had lost two of his front teeth.

"Sit down," Bartlett said curtly. He indicated one of the two chairs on the other side of the table.

Gail obeyed, and clasped her hands.

"Miss Hollister," Bartlett went on, "there is just one thing that will keep you out of jail."

He paused so that his pronouncement might sink in. Gail was not greatly disturbed by it. She had gone through so much that the threat, real as it might be, had not the power to move her deeply. She was curious as to his meaning, however.

"What is that?" she inquired.

"I want the Conniston intaglios. You know where they are."

Gail smiled wearily. "I don't know

anything about the Conniston intaglios."

Bartlett's fist crashed down upon the table. "You do! Where are they?"

GAIL meditated. Evidently Bartlett had his eye on Stark's ten-thousand-dollar reward. But she suspected that it would take more than the recovery of the intaglios to keep her out of jail, if the evidence against her warranted her arrest. She considered Bartlett narrowly for a moment, and was taken by the thought that his faith in his theories had been shaken. This was as it should be, of course. The discovery of the trap-door must have struck at the root of it.

"I don't know anything about the intaglios," she repeated calmly. "But if you like I'll tell you what I do know. And I'll answer any questions you care to ask me."

"Too bad you didn't do that the other morning!" Bartlett rapped out. "It might have helped you then; it wont now. But go ahead, if it'll relieve your mind."

His indifference was largely assumed, Gail believed. He was really intensely interested in what she had to say. So was Stark. He was leaning forward with a look of anticipation in his gray-green eyes.

Gail began with her friendship for Kerry, proceeded to the hold-up and the shock it had been to her, and went on to her arrival at the Casa de Ayer. She described in detail her interview with Conniston, the strangeness of his manner when she mentioned the intaglios, the glimpse she got of Stark in the moonlight, and the finding of Conniston's body. Then she related how Kerry had come in through the library window and cut the cord which bound the legs of the dead man, and why she had deemed it advisable that he should keep in the background.

By now she got into the swing of her narrative and with a fine sense of the dramatic she described Kerry's interest in the intaglios, their history, his interview with Conniston, and his return to the estate, where he had passed the night.

This brought her to the hold-up again, to the motive behind it, and to the character of Kerry O'Neil.

With a brilliant stroke or two, she depicted that extraordinary young man, and prayed that she had secured the effect of reality.

There remained the matter of Dimity. Gail now told of the old man's "listening and watching," of their encounter in the patio, and of his insistence that she meet him at the summer-house. She mentioned her belief that they had been overheard and that she attributed Dimity's death to this fact. She did not mention Stark.

When Gail had finished there was silence for a moment. Bartlett lit a cigar with maddening slowness.

"Quite a yarn, so far as it goes!" he drawled. "You don't expect me to believe it, do you?"

Gail took it coolly.

"No," she said steadily. "I supposed you wouldn't."

Bartlett drew on his cigar.

"If you'd told me this before," he said harshly, "we might have had O'Neil and saved Dimity."

Gail whitened.

"What do you mean by that?" she whispered. She knew very well what he meant.

"I mean that Dimity got onto something and that O'Neil cracked him over the head to shut his mouth. We'll get him, of course. I've ten men on the peninsula looking for him. And there's a posse out from the village. If the posse gets him, and there's a rope handy, the Lord help O'Neil! Come through with the intaglios, my girl!"

"Do you mean to say you are going

to stand for that sort of thing?" she cried, in a frenzy of terror and fury. "You know what a mob is capable of, yet you sit there doing nothing! What a cold-blooded beast you are!"

She spun round and rushed toward the window. Stark barred the way.

"Not so fast, young lady!" he jeered. He put his hand on her arm.

Gail sprang back as if she had been stung, and Stark's face darkened at the expression that leaped into her eyes.

"Don't you touch me!" she cried passionately.

"Oh, sit down!" Bartlett shouted. "I've enough men out there to stop that sort of foolery. Sit down and tell me what you've done with the intaglios."

Gail faced him again.

"I don't know anything about them! Ask Norman Stark! He can tell you! Ask him about Colonel Conniston and old Dimity!"

Stark's heavy face crimsoned.

"By God, girl! Have you the gall to accuse me of that, too!"

Gail whirled upon him again.

"Yes, I have! You overheard us in the patio! You came back here——"

"Silence there!" Bartlett thundered. "Stark, shut up! Hollister, sit down! Sit down, I tell you!"

Gail faced him defiantly. She was bewitchingly lovely in her anger. Then she sank down into the chair.

"Stark did not kill either Conniston or Dimity!" Bartlett said curtly. "That is clear to me if it isn't to you. He is more interested in the intaglios than anyone else, that cock-and-bull yarn of O'Neil's to the contrary. Conniston died without a will. Stark is his sole heir."

"There you have his motive!" Gail cut in wildly.

"Keep quiet!" Bartlett roared. "Dimity was a possibility, I'll admit, but he's dead, and that lets him out. Mrs. Wessels couldn't have pulled the thing off. That leaves you and O'Neil. The evidence is against you, and there's enough of it to hang O'Neil."

"There isn't!" Gail cried. "Your theories are without foundation!" (She wished this were true!) "You say Stark didn't kill Conniston. How do you know he didn't? Has he been able to prove that he was in Los Angeles when Conniston was killed? Have you forgotten that Mrs. Wessels and I saw him in the moonlight? You say he did not kill Dimity. How do you know he didn't? You and Stark came back last night because you thought I might lead you to Kerry, but you were not together all the time. How do you know he didn't follow Dimity to the summer-house?

"You narrow your suspects down to Kerry and me. Have you forgotten that trap-door we found last night? Stark, or anyone else, might have entered and left by way of it a dozen times for all you know! Evidence!" Gail cried witheringly. "You are so sure that Kerry O'Neil is the man you want that you are blind to everything else!"

ASTONISHED at her own eloquence, Gail delivered herself of this final shaft and eyed the deputy, flushed and defiant. Her summary of the defects in the evidence against Kerry and herself had been shrewd and intelligent; but she was too wise to believe that these defects were as significant as she had pretended. Bartlett, she perceived, was unshaken in his belief that Kerry was guilty; but he was troubled by the growing complexity of the case.

"Not bad," he drawled presently. "You've forgotten one thing, though."

"What?"

"How do you account for having the combination of the vault in your possession? You or O'Neil opened the vault last night."

Gail nodded.

"Kerry thought he might find something you had missed, and he insisted on coming up. He was right. We found the combination."

Bartlett grunted ironically. "Found it, eh! You'll have to do better than that!"

Gail shrugged impatiently and pointed to the writing pad, one corner of which Kerry had torn off.

"Someone scribbled down the combination and blotted it on the corner of the pad," she explained. "I caught the reflection in this mirror."

Gail picked up the Venetian mirror, which still lay on the table, and demonstrated how this had come about.

"We tried the combination on the vault door. It opened. Stark came in, then."

"Where is the corner of the blotter?"

"Kerry tore it off. He still has it."

"He would have, of course."

There came an interruption just then. Unnoticed by Gail, Mrs. Wessels had hovered in the doorway throughout this spirited argument. Now she advanced into the room, hands on her hips.

"What's all this about a will, Mr. Bartlett?" she demanded aggressively. "I 'eard you say a minute ago——"

"There is no will!" Bartlett rapped out. "Conniston died intestate. Stark is his heir."

"Indeed!" Mrs. Wessels exploded. "Let me tell you there is a will. Or there *was!*" she added significantly.

"How do you know?"

"The colonel told me 'imself! And what's more, I saw it lying on that very table!"

Mrs. Wessels said this with a fine sense of effect. Stark took a quick step forward; then he stopped abruptly. Gail felt her pulses quicken.

"Did you read the will?" Bartlett queried.

"Did I—what!" Mrs. Wessels exclaimed indignantly. "The colonel said 'e was providing for Dimity and me. ' 'Andsomely,' too, 'e said, like the gentleman he was. That was enough for me!"

"Did you witness the will?"

"No."

"Did Dimity?"

"I don't know."

"Do you know to whom Conniston left the bulk of his estate?"

"I didn't ask 'im!" Mrs. Wessels said pointedly.

BARTLETT pondered for a moment, frowning.

"Queer!" he muttered.

Then he looked up at Stark's glowering face.

"Know anything about it?"

"Certainly not! Never heard of it!" Stark growled. "The woman is crazy!"

"I am not in the 'abit of telling stories!" Mrs. Wessels declared wrathfully.

"I phoned Prescott, Conniston's lawyer," Bartlett commented thoughtfully. "He said there was no will, so far as he knew. If there is one, it's a holograph, I suppose."

"Yes, if there is one!" Stark sneered.

"There must be—or have been," Gail observed deliberately. "Colonel Conniston wouldn't have spoken of it to Mrs. Wessels unless there was. Perhaps," she hazarded shrewdly, "its contents will explain its disappearance when we find it."

Bartlett frowned at her and Stark muttered angrily beneath his breath. Further hostilities were prevented by the intervention of Decker. During the last minute or two he had been prowling around the vault. Now he came quickly forward.

"Take a look at this, will yuh, chief!"

His nasal voice was shrill with excitement.

He laid something on the blotter in front of Bartlett. Gail saw what appeared to be a tiny fragment of gray tweed cloth such as might have been pulled out of a frayed coat sleeve. Stark came over and Mrs. Wessels edged nearer.

"Where did you find this?" Bartlett demanded.

"Stuck on the edge of the vault door," Decker proudly indicated the place. "There's grease on the cloth. That's what made it stick to the steel."

Bartlett picked up the lens, which still lay on the table and examined the fragment through it; then he looked up.

"Someone who wore an old gray tweed coat shut the door and caught his sleeve in it. Mrs. Wessels——"

But the housekeeper was already hurrying out of the room, troubled of face, and shaking her head. Bartlett did not call her back. His expression was no longer cold and assured, but deeply perplexed. He seemed to be groping about in a mental way as a man gropes in a darkened room.

Gail had grasped the situation in a flash.

"The owner of the gray tweed coat with the frayed sleeve, Mr. Bartlett—is he the man you want?"

"Maybe."

"If his name should be O'Neil, the answer would be 'Yes,' I suppose?" Gail ventured ironically. "And if it should be——"

"Stark!" the latter supplied venomously.

"Yes, Stark," Gail went on coolly, "the answer would be 'No'?"

Bartlett did not reply.

"It might be Conniston's," he muttered to himself after a moment.

A minute or so later Mrs. Wessels reentered the room carrying a coat on her arm. The coat was of gray tweed and its sleeves were badly frayed and spotted with grease. Gail stared at it, wrinkling her brow. And then, as she recognized the coat, a cry of astonishment broke from her lips.

Bartlett took the coat and compared the fragment with one of the sleeves. Both were the same in color and fabric.

"Whose is it?" he said curtly.

Mrs. Wessels' fat face was quivering; there were tears on her cheeks.

"Out with it!" Bartlett roared. "Whose coat is it?"

Mrs. Wessels drew a deep breath.

"Dimity's," she whispered. "He was wearing it the night the colonel was killed."

CHAPTED XVI

DRIFTWOOD

"DIMITY!" Gail found herself whispering the little man's name as she climbed the staircase. The thing was too incredible for belief. There was something uncanny about it. And yet the fact remained that Dimity had closed the vault door within the last day or two. And if he had closed it, was it not within reason to assume that he might have opened it, also?

His death had seemed to clear him of all *guilty* knowledge of the affair; but this tiny fragment of cloth from a frayed coat sleeve threatened to involve him deeper than ever.

Gail's former suspicions trooped back into her mind. Had Stark and Dimity been in it together, after all? But if they had, why had Stark killed him? And why had Dimity insisted that she meet him at the summer-house? And why——

Gail pressed her hands to her head. Her brain seemed to be bursting with its weight of theory and

counter-theory. The affair had resolved itself into a giant paradox at which her intelligence beat unavailingly. She entered her room and shut the door. It was good to be alone.

The window was open and the curtains trembled in the cool morning breeze. Stepping onto the balcony, she sat down on the low wall that enclosed it. The visibility was crystal clear and she could see down to the end of the peninsula.

Gail began to think of Dimity again. Would the discovery of this fragment of gray tweed shake Bartlett's belief that Kerry had killed Conniston and Dimity? Could he consistently hold to his first theory and suspect Dimity at the same time?

Gail did not see how he could, until she recalled that she herself had entertained the possibility of Stark and Dimity being in the affair together. Might not Bartlett widen his theory to the extent of assuming that Dimity was an accomplice of Kerry, and that the latter had killed him because of expediency or greed?

Weary of fruitless speculation, Gail let her eyes rove over the slope. They encountered a group of men who appeared to be methodically combing the sagebrush just above the road, a mile or so below the house.

Bartlett's men, she thought, with a shiver. He would have others, too, no doubt.

She watched them until they vanished behind a rise in the slope.

A little farther on, and nearer the top of the slope, she saw another group of men, similarly engaged, but less methodical in their operations. This would be the posse of which Bartlett had spoken.

She had a terrifying vision of Judge Lynch enthroned, but it passed quickly. Bartlett was hardly the man to stand for that sort of thing.

Gail was about to reenter her room when a small screwed-up package of paper lying on the floor of the balcony within the shadow of the wall attracted her attention. Picking it up, she was astonished to find herself looking at a crumpled envelope with Kerry O'Neil's name and Los Angeles hotel address typed on it. The envelope was weighted. She opened it and a small key and a triangle of blotting-paper fell out. A bit of paper, neatly folded, was also enclosed. There was writing on it. She opened it with trembling fingers and read:

"Don't worry. I'll look after myself. Love to you and Bartlett." K.

Gail pressed the note to her lips and laughed and wept with joy. Kerry had crept back in the small hours of the morning and tossed it up onto the balcony. He had risked his liberty to assure her that he was safe. What a reckless, lovable mortal he was!

The key, she supposed, belonged to the handcuffs Decker had had to have filed off his wrists. Gail looked at the scrap of blotter thoughtfully.

"I suppose I had better give it to Bartlett," she muttered. "He may be able to identify the handwriting."

She went downstairs. Bartlett was just leaving the house, accompanied by Decker. To the latter Gail gravely presented the key. The scrap of blotter she handed to Bartlett. He studied it for a moment in silence, then he looked at Gail sharply.

"Where did you get this?"

Gail told him, saying nothing of the note.

His face darkened. He seemed about to speak. Instead, he thrust the scrap of blotter into a vest pocket and started for the door.

"Mr. Bartlett."

"Well?"

"Are you still of the opinion that Kerry O'Neil killed Colonel Conniston and Dimity?"

"Why shouldn't I be?"

And with this Bartlett passed on.

STARK had disappeared and Mrs. Wessels was bustling about in her kitchen. Gail looked dismally around her, depressed in spirits. She had undertaken to prove Kerry's innocence by establishing Stark's guilt, but apparently he was still as deeply involved as ever. She did not know where to begin or which way to turn; whether to seek outside advice or to rely upon herself alone.

A horrible sense of futility crept upon her and she faced the day and its burden of inactivity and suspense with dread, completely at a loss to know what to do with herself. Catalog work, in her present mood, would be unendurable.

And then she thought of the secret passage by means of which Kerry had escaped from the Casa de Ayer the night before. Her spirits rose. She would explore it and see where it led to.

"I'll need a light," she reflected.

Bartlett's overcoat hung on the hall stand near the door. An electric torch protruded from one of the pockets. Her eyes danced as they fell upon it.

"How nice of him!" she whispered.

A quick glance around and Gail had deftly possessed herself of the torch, tingling delightfully with a sense of guilt and daring. She ran softly to the cellar door and paused for an instant, listening. Then she fled down the steps, preceded by the light from the torch, and passed into the smaller cellar. The trap was open.

As she bent over it, flooding the cavern with light, the damp breath of kelp and salty sea and the remote musketry of the surf brigades rose to meet her. Not a gleam of sunlight was visible. The entrance of the cavern must be some little distance away, she reflected.

Examining the upper reaches of the place by the light of the torch, Gail saw that the steps were hewn out of the north wall, which sloped steeply to the slanting bottom of the cavern, some thirty feet below. The south wall dropped with a marked incurve so that the bottom of the cavern was considerably wider than the top. The opening below the trap was oblong; perhaps some twelve feet in length and eight in width.

From where she stood, Gail could not tell whether the cavern extended straight beneath the patio to the beach or not. She suspected that it didn't.

The character of the place caught her imagination and she realized how strongly its possibilities as a secret exit must have appealed to the romantic instincts of the Old-World aristocrat who had built his home on top of it.

Not without trepidation, Gail cautiously let herself down the ladder into the mouth of the pit. She found the top step with her feet and her hand encountered a line of rusty cable which was pegged to the gray sandstone wall. The cable seemed fairly solid, and using it to steady herself she began to carefully descend the rough-hewn steps, swinging the light beam ahead of her.

GAIL had gone but a short distance when the wall swung sharply to the right and she found herself in a large vaulted chamber that reechoed thunderously with the musketry of the tide.

She peered around her breathlessly, overcome by the weirdness of the place, and led on by the explor-

ing beam of the torch to fresh exclamations of wonder.

Continuing, she found the descent easier, and she quickly reached the sloping bottom, which was covered with sand and pebble and small boulders. As she picked her way down the treacherous floor she thought of Kerry escaping along it at midnight with nothing but matchlight to guide him, and she prayed that his gift for extricating himself from impossible situations had not deserted him.

The chamber ended in a narrow passage, the straight gray walls of which rose some forty feet above her. Gail had followed the passage a short distance when it turned abruptly to the left and she saw an oblong of brilliant sunlight ahead of her. The walls grew damper.

Garlands of dried kelp brought in by the summer high tides crackled beneath her feet. Sand fleas burrowed before the flare of the torch and the boom of the surf grew louder. A minute later she passed out onto the beach.

The mouth of the cavern was a mere slit in the face of the rock, indicative of anything but the remarkable natural chamber behind. It was a hundred yards or so north of the patio.

Gail had never been on this part of the beach before, her several excursions to the shore all being below the house, and she looked around her with fresh interest.

She was in a small cove rather completely cut off from the beach on each side of it by protecting arms of rock which jutted out into the ocean. These arms of rock, some fifteen feet in height, were not unscalable; nevertheless, they presented a definite barrier to anyone who might wish to reach the cove.

The cliff was over a hundred feet in height at this point and dangerously concave near the top, the base having crumbled away due to the action of the elements. So much so, indeed, that the bottom of the cliff and a narrow strip of the beach adjoining it could not be seen from the top.

Near the center of the cove and against the base of the cliff was a flat outcropping of rock, and upon this rock was a pile of drift-wood.

Gail approached the pile curiously. She had come within a yard of it when she tripped and would have fallen had she not quickly recovered herself.

Looking down, she saw a four-gallon oil-can almost completely buried in the sand. It was over this that she had stumbled. She took hold of the handle and found that the can was full of coal-oil.

Her curiosity deepened and she looked at the driftwood thoughtfully. It had been piled recently and, judging from the can of coal-oil, a fire was intended.

But why should anyone go to the trouble of preparing for a fire on this isolated part of the beach? Gail didn't know and she wanted to, rather badly.

There was something about this pile of driftwood that teased and eluded her, that touched but did not awaken a latent chord in her memory.

And then a voice hailed her.

"Well, what do you make of it?"

Gail whirled on her heel.

Perrin, the reporter, stood behind her.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAN HUNT

GAIL had not spoken with Perrin since they had talked together in the museum two days before, and she had not seen him since the inquest. He had

led her to believe, presumably at Bartlett's instigation, that the latter, his men, and Stark were leaving the Casa de Ayer the previous night.

And while Kerry, having recklessly stepped into the trap, had tempestuously stepped out of it again, her feelings toward Perrin were anything but amicable, and she felt that she ought to treat him with the contempt she thought he rightly deserved. But Gail had grown wary of late.

Perrin might be persuaded to help her; she had better not be too severe with him.

"I don't know," she said, eyeing him coolly. "Where did you come from?"

He nodded toward the spur of rock on the south side of the cove.

"I was going back over there. I came through the cave. Queer place, isn't it? Like an Old World castle. It'll make good dope for the *Blade*."

Gail's eyes sparkled.

"Well," she said, "if it makes good copy, that's the important thing, I suppose."

Perrin reddened.

"Rub it in!" he mumbled. "I don't blame you. Bartlett had a hunch O'Neil might turn up if he thought the coast was clear, and he picked me for the job. He thought you'd have more confidence in me than you would have in anyone else."

"Quite a compliment to you," Gail murmured.

Perrin shuffled miserably.

"It was a rotten thing to do, in a way. But, we all thought O'Neil guilty. We still think so, especially after last night."

Gail changed the subject.

"I wonder who piled that driftwood there? It seems such an odd place for a fire."

Perrin nodded, vastly relieved at the turn in the conversation.

"That's what I thought. It's quite a climb over the rocks, whichever way you go. The wood is bone dry and there's a can of coal-oil. Whoever built it must want a devil of a big blaze. It would make a great signal on a dark night."

"Signal," Gail echoed. "A signal."

The word found sympathetic response in her memory, but the association of ideas she wanted eluded her.

Perrin leaped at the possibilities of the idea.

"That's it!" he cried excitedly. "It's just the place for a signal fire! The driftwood can't be seen from the top of the cliff and I don't suppose people come around here much during the day, or ever at night. Look at that ledge, and notice the incurve of the cliff. The ledge would raise the fire above the beach, the incurve would reflect the blaze back on itself! It would be seen for miles out to sea."

Gail looked at him silently for a moment, or rather she set her eyes upon his honest face. She was looking back into the fastness of her own mind.

Perrin seemed to sense that she was striving to recall something, and he waited expectantly for her to speak.

Quite suddenly, Gail had what she was seeking. Green lights! Merely green lights! What could they have to do with the affair at the Casa de Ayer?

"Someone was s i g n a l i n g last night!" she cried breathlessly. "At least, I think—no, I'm *sure!* I saw three green flashes, one after another."

"What time?"

"Just before I found Dimity!"

"Midnight," Perrin muttered.

He looked doubtfully at the heap of driftwood.

"I wonder if they were signaling

to whoever built this; it hasn't been fired yet."

"Perhaps a fire meant 'safety'; no fire, 'danger,'" Gail suggested.

Perrin slapped his thigh.

"Bootleggers!" he shouted. "I'll bet my hat! They saw Bartlett and his men nosing around and they were scared off."

"But they wouldn't run liquor in here," Gail objected.

"No, but they might signal from here that it was safe to run it in somewhere else! Down toward the point, perhaps."

GAIL nodded, her interest gone. She could not understand why she had thought that the driftwood or the green lights might be connected with the affair at the Casta de Ayer. Perrin tempered his enthusiasm to her changed mood.

"A lot of stuff has come in around here lately," he went on. "Right under the noses of the revenue men, too. Maybe I'll get a write-up out of it."

He paused, aware of her lack of interest, and glanced toward the south arm of the cove.

"I was going back that way. Do you want to return through the cave?"

"It doesn't matter. I'll come with you."

They walked to the spur of rock in silence. Gail was thinking, and Perrin helped her over the barrier without comment. When they were down on the other side Gail turned on him suddenly.

"I suppose," she said, "you believe that Kerry O'Neil killed Dimity?"

"Bartlett thinks so."

"Don't you ever think for yourself?"

Perrin reddened.

"What else do you expect?" he demanded petulantly. "If O'Neil killed Conniston, and Dimity knew this, O'Neil had the strongest of motives for finishing him, too. Lord! I wish you hadn't asked me!"

Perrin groaned miserably.

"I have to look at the facts as they are. You would, too, if you weren't in love with him. Can't you see O'Neil is using you? It wont help him, either. They'll get him—bound to! And he'll hang on the evidence!"

Gail was undisturbed by this outburst.

"How do you account for that fragment of Dimity's coat sleeve which Decker found on the vault door?"

Perrin shook his head.

"I can't, unless he and O'Neil were in it together, and O'Neil killed Dimity because he didn't trust him."

"But if Kerry killed Dimity he must have done so *before* he came up to the house with me," Gail went on. "He couldn't have done it afterward; Bartlett and Stark and Peters were too close behind him."

"I know."

"Then he must have killed Dimity while I was with him," Gail said deliberately.

She paused; her eyes, wide and deep, questioned Perrin gravely.

"That would make me an accessory to the crime, wouldn't it?"

Perrin whitened a little.

"I've been thinking about that, too," he mumbled.

"And you believe——"

"I do not!" he shouted furiously. "I don't care what Bartlett says! You couldn't have been in on it!"

Gail smiled triumphantly.

"Then Kerry O'Neil couldn't have, either! And if he didn't kill Dimity he didn't kill Colonel Conniston!"

Perrin shook his head. "No," he said doggedly. "O'Neil is guilty. I'm sure of it. There's something wrong somewhere, though. The pieces don't fit."

He thought for a minute as they proceeded along the beach.

"Tell you what I'll do. I've a hunch there's something behind these killings that Bartlett isn't onto. What it is, I don't know. Maybe Stark is the man we want, after all, instead of O'Neil. Mind, I don't think he is, but I'll watch him for a day or two and I'll try to get on to your viewpoint. Will you do something for me?"

"What?" Gail asked quickly.

"I am going to stick down here for my paper until the case 'breaks.' If you know anything, or get onto anything, give me the first shot at it."

"I will indeed!" Gail cried.

She was delighted at her small success.

THEY returned to the Casa de Ayer by way of the summer-house trail, discussing the case with an air of detachment which lent itself to a better understanding of their respective points of view. Perrin had a flexible mind and Gail had high hopes of completely winning him over.

Mrs. Wessels met them in the patio. She responded to Gail's anxious inquiry as to whether Kerry had been taken with a decisive shake of her head.

"Not as I've 'eard, Miss 'Ollister. But there's a gentleman waiting to see you in the sun-room. And a fine gentleman 'e is."

"Who is it?" Gail asked.

"He wouldn't say."

Curious as to whom it could be, Gail first returned the torch to Bartlett's overcoat pocket; she then proceeded to the sun-room.

On the threshold of the room she stopped with a cry of delight and surprise. Then she rushed toward the slightly-built elderly man with the neat brown beard and the jovial, intelligent eyes, who was coming toward her.

"Doctor McEwan!" she cried, enraptured.

"My dear Gail!"

The director of the Westcoast Museum took the girl's hands in his. His brown eyes were smiling, but they were troubled and questioning, too. For a moment Gail was too overcome to speak, and when she found her voice it was husky with emotion.

"You don't know how glad I am to see you!" she cried.

Doctor McEwan smiled whimsically; then his kindly face sobered a little.

"I have come to look after you, my dear. By all accounts you need someone. What have you been doing with yourself?"

Gail laughed unsteadily.

"Have you seen Mr. Bartlett?"

"Yes. I met him as I drove in. I happen to know Bartlett. He's a clever chap, in his way. Poor Conniston! I've read the newspapers, of course, but I want you to tell me all about it, just as it happened. Every word of it, remember!"

Gail shut the door of the sun-room and they sat down together by the broad expanse of window overlooking the sunbright ocean. For the second time that morning Gail told her story, omitting nothing, not even her love for Kerry. That, of course, was the mainspring of everything she had done.

Doctor McEwan heard her through without comment. He was one of those sympathetic listeners who win confidences by the golden quality of their silences.

"You seem to have yourself in a pretty mess, my dear," he smiled when she had finished.

"I couldn't have done anything else, Doctor McEwan."

His eyes twinkled for a moment.

"Well, you might have done nothing at all."

He sobered again.

"This man O'Neil, Gail. You don't know much about him; neither do I. He's had rather a spectacular career. Are you sure—are you quite sure your feelings for him——"

Gail cut him short.

"Don't, please! There'll never be anyone else! I've known it from the first! I couldn't have done what I have if it weren't true!"

THERE was such a wealth of feeling in her voice that he looked at her in surprise.

Her eyes widened with distress.

"You are not going to tell me you think as Barlett and Perrin and the others do," she pleaded. "I don't think I could stand it, if you did."

He patted her on the shoulder.

"Now, now, Gail. You must brace up. I'm not going to believe anything about anybody until I've looked around for myself. Dear, dear! I never expected to turn detective, but one never knows! Sometimes the lay mind gets a different angle of a case. You must face the facts, though, whatever they are. You don't like Stark?"

"He's a beast!"

McEwan nodded.

"Well, perhaps he is. Are you and Mrs. Wessels sure it was Stark you saw in the moonlight?"

"Quite! You may ask Mrs. Wessels."

"Very well. I shall start with the assumption that Stark was here the night Colonel Conniston was killed."

"If he was here, he killed Conniston; and if he killed Conniston he killed Dimity!" Gail cried.

"Not so fast, my dear. We must prove one thing at a time."

Doctor McEwan stood up.

"I shouldn't be surprised if everything turns out happily," he said, with a twinkle. "Bartlett gave me permission to nose around. He really wants to solve the thing, you know. I think I shall begin in the library; that is where it happened.

"No, don't come with me," he went on, as Gail rose to her feet. "I want to go about it in my own way. I'll have a chat with Mrs. Wessels and Stark. And I'll take a look at that cave and that pile of driftwood. There's Dimity, too. All of you have the advantage of me there. Still, one can never tell. Brace up, my dear, and don't worry."

Doctor McEwan strolled out of the room, fingering his neat brown beard.

Gail felt as if her burden of responsibility had been cut in half. There was something so splendidly dependable about Doctor McEwan, so fine and true. His reputation as an archeologist was world-wide; he had that quality of imagination which illumines the sciences with the torchlight of art. Gail expected much of her direction, Doctor McEwan.

The afternoon passed, night came on, and Kerry O'Neil had not been taken. Throughout the day, all over the peninsula, there had been unceasing activity on the part of Bartlett and his men. At the house, cars roared up and down the drive. Bartlett frowned and Decker scowled. An atmosphere of uncertainty settled upon the Casa de Ayer, haunted its dark-timbered rooms, variously affected those who entered and left its portals.

Doctor McEwan pursued his investigations unobtrusively and without comment.

All night, Bartlett's men searched the peninsula, stabbing the depths of gully and cavern with the slanting beams of their torches, but when morning came O'Neil was still at liberty.

It was incredible to Gail. The peninsula was limited in extent; Bartlett had thrown a cordon of men across it to prevent Kerry's escape

to the north; more men had combed every inch of it, and beyond the point and on each side of the peninsula the ocean presented an impassable barrier. Where, then, had Kerry managed to hide himself?

At first Gail had been overjoyed at Bartlett's discomfiture, but as the second day wore on her delight was tempered with uncertainty, then with apprehension; and finally, there still being no word of Kerry, she found herself in terror.

She imagined him lying at the bottom of some hidden gully with a broken leg. Or perhaps he had fallen over the cliffs, been killed, and his body been carried out by the tide.

Doctor McEwan thought differently, however.

"No, no," he said, when Gail had expressed her fears to him. "That young man of yours has too much imagination to let himself fall over a cliff in the dark. He'll turn up before long. Bartlett is convinced he is still on the peninsula."

"But they've looked everywhere!" Gail objected.

McEwan smiled.

"Trust your Kerry, my dear, and don't worry. He's probably right under Bartlett's nose."

And with this Gail had to be content.

DOCTOR McEWAN, indeed, was the only undisturbed member of that considerably augmented household. (Bartlett, Decker, Stark and McEwan had all taken up quarters there, much to Mrs. Wessels' disgust. The Gills had gone back to Los Angeles, but were to return for the inquest of Dimity's death the next day.)

Bartlett maintained his cold, humorless front, but behind it was anxiety and seething fury. The morning papers had panned him severely for his conduct of the case, and he had whipped his men up to a frenzy of effort. Gail kept out of his way as much as possible, for she realized that he might take it into his head to arrest her at any moment.

Stark was sullen and restive and inclined to resent McEwan's presence. The latter, however, professed to be unconscious of the attitude of his host. He pursued his investigations calmly and skillfully questioned whom he chose.

Suspicion, unrest, tense expectancy gathered in the Casa de Ayer like thunder-heads in a summer sky. Keen-eyed reporters prowled around the place, bared the innermost recesses of cupboard and closet, questioned all and sundry. The house was in turmoil.

Still no word of Kerry. It was rumored that Bartlett had sent for bloodhounds. Gail was frantic when she heard it. The rumor was denied, however.

Perrin, the reporter, was away most of the day. After dinner he returned, and Gail ran into him in the patio. His face was flushed with excitement.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"Where can we go? Is McEwan around? I got on to something!"

Gail hurried him into the sun parlor and there they found Doctor McEwan sitting by one of the windows looking out across a sunset sea of mauve and gold, of cerise and blue and flaming orange. He looked up with a smile as they entered. Gail had introduced Perrin to him the day before. They were familiar with each other's purpose.

"Hello, there," he said.

Gail shut the door, pushed Perrin into a chair and dropped into another herself.

"Mr. Perrin has something to tell us!" she announced breathlessly.

The young man grinned.

"I don't know that it amounts to much, after all, sir."

"Let us hear it, Perrin."

"Miss Hollister seemed to think that Stark knows more about the death of Conniston than he had admitted," Perrin began. "I didn't think so, myself, but I thought I'd make one or two inquiries down at the village. Stark has a gray sport roadster, one of those high-powered Druids, and I figured that if he was down here the night Colonel Conniston was killed he came in his Druid. You don't see many of them on the road, and it occurred to me that if Stark had driven through the village that night or morning some late bird might have noticed the car.

"I went to the garage first. There were half a dozen men hanging around the office. They were talking cars, of course. You'd think there wasn't anything else to talk about these days; and I dropped in a word or two about the Druid models. That got them going on Druids. Then I switched to the Conniston murder.

"Nothing was said for a while. In fact, I didn't expect anything at all; it was just a shot in the dark. But shortly after that one of them boys said that a man by the name of Bill Dale saw a Druid sport roadster roar through the village the other night or morning. I could hardly believe my ears at first. Then I inquired about Bill Dale and finally located him in the barber shop.

"Dale is a sullen, boozy cuss and I couldn't get him to talk for a while. At last he loosened up and told me that he had been out looking for a drink, around one a. m., I guess, the morning Conniston was killed. He got his drink, two or three, perhaps, stuck around the booze shanty for a couple of hours or so, and came out onto the main street. And then and there he saw the Druid scorch past. It was about three, then. I gave him a couple of dollars and he loosened up again and told me some more.

"A man by the name of Burke lives in the village. He owns an ancient Ford which he parks on the street near the hotel day and night when he's not using it. Burke's Ford has a ripped top that flaps in a funny way. It's the village joke. Everybody knows it. Now, Burke was playing poker in Sullivan's poolroom all of the night Colonel Conniston was killed and he and the men he was with swear he didn't leave the table between nine p. m. and four a. m.

"But Dale went out for his drink about one a. m. and he swears he saw Burke's Ford rattle off down the street in this direction. Remember, this happened two hours *before* he saw the Druid.

"I looked up Burke next. He doesn't amount to much, either, same type as Dale. But he claimed that his Ford was used by someone that night or morning. He's a crank on his gas cost. The day before, he'd been on a fishing trip and when he got home he had taken a note of his gas consumption and his mileage. The next morning he found that his speedometer registered five miles more than it had the night before. It is just five miles from here to the village and back."

Perrin looked at Doctor McEwan with a grin.

"That's all, sir."

There was silence for a moment. Gail was trembling with excitement, but she waited for McEwan to speak. Perrin, notwithstanding the casual manner of his recital, had an air of achievement.

"And a good deal, too, I should say," McEwan commented. "You have done pretty well, young man."

Gail could restrain herself no longer.

"*Now*, are you convinced that Mrs. Wessels and I saw Stark in the moonlight?" she cried triumphantly.

"I am!" Perrin burst forth.

McEwan chuckled.

"We mustn't forget that there are other Druid cars on the road and that one of them may have been driven out in this direction about the time Conniston was killed. The road is closed further on, I understand, but the driver of the car *perhaps* got onto it by mistake."

"I never thought of that!" Perrin exclaimed.

"However," McEwan went on, with a twinkle, "I rather think it was Stark's car that the man Dale saw."

"You have found something yourself!" Gail joyously accused him.

Doctor McEwan took a large envelope from an inner pocket and drew out of it a sheet of carbon paper of the letter-head size. He held the carbon up to the light and Gail saw that it had been used, but once, and upon a typewriter.

"I found this in the drawer of Colonel Conniston's library table along with other writing materials. Bartlett seems to have missed it. There is a small portable typewriter in a case on the floor near the table. Conniston's handwriting was almost illegible and he seems to have used a typewriter for all of his correspondence, keeping a carbon copy for his files.

"The letter which appears on this carbon was written to Norman Stark on the 20th of August. Conniston died around midnight of the 23d, or very early on the morning of the 24th. The impression is intact; probably it was the last letter Conniston wrote. I read it from the carbon paper and it interested me intensely. I looked for the copy on the file, but I could not find it, though copies of other letters to Stark were there. Here is a copy I made myself from the impression."

McEWAN took a sheet of notepaper from the envelope and handed it to Gail. Perrin glanced over her shoulder. They read:

> NEPHEW: I have definitely made up my mind in this matter. If you wish to come down on the 23rd or the 24th and go into it again, as you suggest, you may do so. But I warn you that nothing you may say will have the slightest effect upon the decision I have come to.
>
> PHILIP CONNISTON.

Perrin whistled.

"Short and sweet, eh? Get the force of that 'Nephew'?"

McEwan nodded.

"They were not on very good terms, I understand."

"What was the trouble?"

"Stark's morals, I believe. Conniston was rigid on that point."

"Do you suppose it refers to Conniston's will?" Gail asked thoughtfully.

McEwan meditated, stroking his beard.

"I think it does. Judging from the wording of this letter, there was other correspondence about the matter, whatever it is. But none of it is on file."

"The will is gone," Gail said quickly. "So are the intaglios. Is there any doubt in your mind now that Stark took them and that he killed Colonel Conniston and Dimity?"

McEwan replaced the carbon and the copy in the envelope and returned it to his pocket. He looked at Gail whimsically.

"I understand your feelings for O'Neil, my dear, but I wish you would try and take a more objective view of the case. We now have damaging evidence against Stark, Dimity, and O'Neil. For instance, if Dimity is innocent, how did that fraying of his coat sleeve get caught

in the vault door? To me none of these men are guilty, for the simple reason that any one of them may be guilty. We can theorize endlessly, of course. But what we want is proof."

"A case of take your choice," Perrin muttered.

"Precisely. I wish O'Neil would give himself up."

"Kerry didn't do it," Gail said simply, "and Stark did. I can feel it."

"I hope O'Neil didn't, either, my dear; but don't depend on intuition too much. I think we had better keep what we have discovered to ourselves for a day or two. Bartlett believes that Stark is innocent. I don't want him to change his attitude toward Stark just yet."

"How about that rattle-trap Ford Dale saw heading this way?" Perrin demanded suddenly. "Do you suppose there is anything to it?"

McEwan grew thoughtful.

"I don't know," he said. "There are so many loose ends sticking out of the case that one is at a loss to know which are connected and which are not. That pile of driftwood and those green lights that Gail saw, for instance. Better make a few more inquiries down at the village, Perrin."

They talked a little while longer; then Doctor McEwan returned to his investigations and Gail went up to her room.

There was still no word of Kerry O'Neil.

CHAPTER XVIII

SUPPRESSED EVIDENCE

THE search for Kerry O'Neil went on through the night.

Gail got little sleep. She imagined him in a dozen fearful situations: alive but maimed; broken and dead; perishing for lack of food; carried out to sea. Hope would come to her sometimes and she would steal out of bed to the window and peer into the white night, praying that he had been found as earnestly as she had previously prayed that he might not be.

But always the activity on the peninsula continued unabated; car headlights slashed white lanes through the night, torchlights stabbed at shadow and gully and cavern. If anything had happened to him, she felt that she would die.

Dawn found Gail sitting by the window. Her eyes were tired and anxious; the color had gone from her cheeks; she was weary in body and spirit. The sun touched her hair and a faint glow relieved the pallor of her face.

Presently, she heard Mrs. Wessels moving around below, whereupon she passed into the bathroom and filled and got into the tub. The cold water refreshed her; she dressed quickly and went downstairs. Mrs. Wessels was in the kitchen. She greeted Gail tearfully and tenderly.

"They 'aven't got 'im yet, Miss 'Ollister," she went on. "But don't you be a-worrying about 'im, now. He'll be all right. Turn up like a bad penny, 'e will."

Gail was on the verge of tears and she could only nod her head despondently. Mrs. Wessels perceived her distress and, pointing to a bronze vessel which stood on the kitchen table near the butter-dish, turned to matters less intimate, if equally uncheerful.

"There it is, Miss 'Ollister," she said soberly. "Dimity's urn that's got 'is dead wife's ashes in it. I found it in 'is room last night. What's going to become of it is more than I know."

Gail hastily retrieved the urn from the breakfast miscellany and examined it with interest and respect. The

vessel was of bronze, in shape like a bulging vase; it had two curved handles and a solid base of the same metal. There was no inscription on it.

The urn was effectively turned and Gail judged that it had cost Dimity a good deal. What a queer whim to indulge! And how he must have cherished the memory of his dead wife!

Her eyes grew dim at the thought. She put the urn down on a chair.

"Hasn't Dimity any one at all?"

"Not a living soul," Mrs. Wessels declared solemnly.

Gail thought; then her face lighted up.

"They are usually kept in mausoleums," she said. "But sometimes people carry them around with them, and sometimes they seal them up in niches in rocks and cliffs where their loved ones would like them to be. I know just such a place. I am sure Dimity would like it, too. Perhaps I ought—I wonder if Stark——"

"I shouldn't ask 'im! It isn't 'is corpse!' Mrs. Wessels said stoutly. "I wish you would put it away, too. Having it around makes me think of poor Wessels in 'is coffin."

"I believe I shall," Gail whispered, more to herself than to the other.

"You'll need a bit of breakfast first, dearie," the housekeeper observed.

And so, after lunch, it being low tide then, Gail found herself approaching Cathedral rock. She carried the urn wrapped in a clean sheet that made her think of a shroud. An abalone shell which she had picked up on the beach was the only interment tool she had. She had left the house openly, but no one had attempted to stop her.

O'Neil was still at liberty and Bartlett and his men were too intent on finding him to pay attention to anyone else. Doctor McEwan had disappeared immediately after breakfast.

As she neared the great rock its atmosphere found response in her being again. There was a quality of stability and performance about it that soothed her troubled spirit and gave her a sense of peace she had not known for several days.

As she stood in front of the rock and looked up at the altar-like effect of its façade, thinking of what she had come to do, it seemed more impressive than ever.

She climbed the tiny steps and curled up on the sun-warmed platform, by the side of the font-like pool sunk into it. A tiny crab scuttled into the dark niche behind. The font was roughly three feet long, eighteen inches wide, and two feet deep. A residue of sand lay at the bottom, and it was filled to the brim with seawater as clear as crystal.

Gail proceeded to bale out the font with the abalone shell. It was a lengthy undertaking and she wished she had brought a pan of some sort from the house. At last she reached the sand deposit, which proved to be a foot or so in thickness and she pressed the shrouded urn down into it, until it was almost entirely covered with sand.

Then, using the shell, she scooped up more sand and rock and pebble and completely filled in the font, not, however, without appreciating the significance of what she was doing.

"I'll get Kerry to cement it in some day," she told herself.

She did not think of the corrosive effect of salt water on metal. She did not think of the legal aspect of what she had done. Merely had she a sense of the moral rightness of it; Dimity would wish the ashes of his wife to be at rest and she had made it possible for them to be.

FOR a little while longer Gail sat on the sun-warmed ledge; then she made her way around the rock, passed from beneath its impressive shadow, and

with no definite objective in view continued along the beach toward the point. She had not gone below Cathedral Rock before, and she regarded the unfamiliar contour of the cliff with lively interest.

The solitude, the harsh beauty of rocky spur and promontory, and the lash of the surf stimulated her. Curiously enough, she began to feel as if she were approaching some sort of a climax.

Presently, there came a bend in the shoreline and the grounds of the Casa de Ayer vanished from sight. The cliffs, rent and caverned here and there, stretched before her as precipitously as ever.

On the top of the cliff, just beyond the bend, she saw a thickly-wooded grove of well-grown cypress trees. The grove was between the edge of the cliff and the unused dirt road which ran along the top. Near it, a steep trail wound down the cliff to the beach below.

At this point the beach consisted of a flat outcropping of rock, some hundred and fifty yards long. Gail climbed onto this outcropping of rock and had gone about halfway across it when she came upon a narrow, sloping depression, not unlike the approach to a city subway, which appeared to run down into the bowels of the cliff.

Her curiosity was instantly aroused, and Gail had permitted it to lead her down the depression a dozen yards or so, when she found herself facing a sort of tunnel blocked by a stout wooden door. There was a small barred opening in the door and through it came the boom of huge volumes of water cannonading in subterranean caverns and the stench of kelp rotting in foul and sunless regions. The door fascinated Gail.

Oddly enough, she felt that it concerned her intimately, and she longed to see what lay behind it as intensely as Bluebeard's wife must have desired to know the secret of the room in which hung her seven predecessors.

A brass plate with an inscription of some sort engaged upon it was secured to the door. The poor light had prevented her from seeing it at first glance. Above her head hung a tangled mass of ice plant; she moved it aside. A shaft of sunlight fell across the plate and she read:

Here Died
DON SYLVESTRE CALDERON
Gentleman of Spain
1780—1846

Gail smiled sadly. This, then, was the pit in which the body of the man who had built the Casa de Ayer had been found. It was said that he had died of a broken heart.

"Gentleman of Spain!" Gail whispered.

What an epitaph! She had heard that Colonel Conniston had had the door put there and had set the plate upon it.

The door was fastened with padlock, hasp, and staple. Involuntarily Gail's hand went to the padlock, and she shook it. To her surprise, it came away in her hand, and she saw that corrosion had rotted the steel. The hasp and the staple were sound.

Evidently, all three had been replaced by Colonel Conniston or Dimity from time to time; the hasp and staple more recently than the padlock, however.

GAIL hesitated fearfully for a moment, then she pressed upon the door. It swung inward and she fell back before a blast of air as foul as a chemist's nightmare. She advanced again, put her head inside the tunnel, took a step or two forward, stopped, and peered blindly ahead.

Light crept in at some remote point, saving the cavern from utter

darkness; but her eyes were not yet accustomed to it and she could see nothing. Nevertheless, her impressions of the place were alarmingly vivid. The floor of the tunnel sloped steeply; it trembled as if a mighty ram were belaboring it from below.

She was deafened by the thunder of the imprisoned waters which rose in terrifying volumes of sound, pillars and clouds of sound that seemed to encompass her with a physical touch, then fell abruptly into awful valleys of silence. Terror struck at her heart.

She imagined herself standing on the verge of a bottomless chasm that would presently engulf her. The hiss and bite and snarl of the tortured waters reminded her of wild beasts in a cage. The stench sickened her.

She wanted to get away from the place, but her eyes were becoming accustomed to the dim light, and she was determined to have a glimpse of it first. A tiny creature slid over her foot and she jerked up her leg with a scream.

Gail would have fled then had not the cavern begun to shape itself out of the dimness. And then the foul horror of what she saw held her to the spot as if it were endowed with an insidious magnetic power.

Some three feet in front of her the tunnel opened into a vaulted chamber as large as a fair-sized room. She had a vision of black rock a-gleam with the sinister luminosity of pitch, of oily, snarling water, or rotting kelp a-swarm with flies.

And then she saw a vast shape moving out of the gloom toward her. It was gleaming black and rounded like the body of a bear, but it had neither arms nor legs nor head. The upper portion of its roundness was alive and a-gleam and a-quiver in a horrible way. Her blood congealed in terror as she stared at it.

She tried to scream, but her lips and throat were parched. The strength ran out of her limbs as water from a leaky vessel, and she would have fallen had not the wall of the tunnel bolstered up her swaying body.

With a prayer on her lips, she closed her eyes and waited.

A full minute passed. Nothing happened. Her terror began to lose its sharp edge; some of her strength returned. She found courage to open her eyes and peer into the gloom before her.

It was still there, but that gleaming monster, limbless, headless, as it had been a minute or two ago. It still moved; the top of it was still alive and a-quiver. But it had come no nearer. Then she gave a cry and a little shrill laugh.

It was merely a round rock, smooth and black and gleaming, that she saw. It was balanced on a sort of natural pivot and it oscillated as a pendulum does, with the rise and fall of the tide.

On the top of it, countless tiny crabs darted back and forth like bits of dark quicksilver. Her imagination had done the rest! Nevertheless, the place was a pit of death and the odor of it was the odor of death. She could imagine a man confined in it for the space of a night and a day going out of his mind.

Gail backed out of the tunnel and closed the door behind her. With trembling hands she slipped the hasp over the staple and hung the broken padlock on the latter. She exhaled the odor of the cavern from her lungs, inhaled deeply several times, and started up the depression. Then she stopped abruptly.

TWO men were standing at the top of the depression, looking seaward. Gail supposed they had come along the beach behind her—she had not noticed them ahead—and stopped to

talk. She was in the shadow and below them, so they did not see her.

There was no reason why she should have stopped, so far as she knew; her pause had been involuntarily. She was about to proceed when she got a view of their faces.

Gail was not timid by nature, but there was in their expressions a quality of character that made her halt. The smaller of the two was a little rattish man with a narrow face and a crooked mouth. The other was different in type, and it was upon him Gail focused her attention.

He had a big, heavy body and a hard, though not unhandsome face, whitish in complexion, and indicative of neither pity nor kindness. Its hardness was the hardness of cruelty, not of strength of character.

Nevertheless, there was a certain sinister elegance about him, a hint of breeding grown rank. He was of that type about which some women can never quite make up their minds, which most men stigmatize as bully and braggart and coward.

Gail frowned in perplexity. She was unconscious of sensations she could not define. Something urged her to creep nearer. She did so, noiselessly, holding her breath. A queer tingling excitement thrilled her. Their voices came to her clearly. Suddenly her body grew rigid. The big man was speaking.

"We shall not be able to bring the stuff in around here now," he said, in a voice thick with passion. "You'll have to see Swanson tomorrow. Each day costs us another five hundred."

The little man snickered.

"Be darn glad we don't have to tell what we know!" he cackled. "If that fly cop knew we seen that guy bat the old man over the head we'd be in the soup for fair! What's the name of the lad they are chasin'?"

"O'Neil, I think. I hope they string him up by the neck!"

"Me, too!"

The big man moved on.

"Let's get out of this, Daniels. We can't do anything hanging around here!"

The other followed him.

Gail stood erect. Her face was dead white; her eyes were blazing. She could hardly credit the evidence of her senses. These two men knew who had killed Dimity! They had seen it done! And they were going off, about their own affairs! They were not going to speak! They hoped Kerry would be strung 'up by the neck!'

For only a moment longer did fury blind her to the counsels of reason. She grew calm and crouching at the top of the depression stared after the two men thoughtfully.

They knew who had killed Dimity. That much was certain. But they would not admit the fact unless they were compelled to. Gail had no doubt on this point. Their own interests—they were rum runners, she supposed—demanded that they keep silent.

But if she informed the police and had the two men charged with knowledge of the crime, they would simply deny everything. If she approached them herself they might harm her; they might even do away with her. That little rat of a man looked capable of anything! In any event, nothing would be accomplished.

Gail saw that they were going toward the trail which ascended the cliff near the cypress grove. No doubt they had a car on the road above. She must get its number; otherwise she would have no means of tracing them.

NEAR the foot of the trail a spur of rock jutted out from the side of the cliff. She must get to this spur of rock and hide behind it while they were ascending the trail. If she wait-

ed until they were out of sight the car might be gone before she could get to the top. She must run the risk of them seeing her.

Gathering herself together, Gail fled across the outcropping of rock toward the spur. She had covered about two-thirds of the distance when the little man stopped and half turned around. Gail halted, believing herself caught.

But the little man merely glanced seaward. He quickly resumed the steep ascent. A moment later Gail was in the shadow of the spur, flushed and breathless, and with a savage joy in her heart.

The two men reached the top and disappeared over the edge of the cliff. Gail ran from behind the spur and started up the trail. It was steep, had been used but little of late, and here and there was actually dangerous.

But Gail was intent on getting to the top before the men drove off and she negotiated the more difficult bits with daring unconcern.

Reaching the top, she bent low and peered over the edge. The men were getting into a powerful touring car which was parked on the dirt road a hundred yards or so from where she was. At that distance she could not distinguish the license number.

Close by was the cypress grove. The men were sitting in the car now, staring off down the road. Bending low, Gail flew across the sandy cliff toward the grove and reached it without being seen. The trees extended as far as the dirt road and she swiftly made her way through them, stopping, a moment or so later, on the edge of the bluff. The touring car was just starting off in the direction of the Green Crocodile, but she could see the numbers on the license plate quite clearly.

Gail repeated them to herself over and over until they rang in her ears like a well-loved refrain. She would never forget them.

The touring car vanished in a cloud of dust.

But Gail quickly lost her sense of triumph. She had the number of the car and by means of it the two men could be easily traced. But what then? She had no means of forcing them to admit what they knew. Her word against theirs would be valueless.

Her achievement, promising as it had seemed, really amounted to nothing. Doctor McEwan *might* be able to help her, but she did not see how he could.

Gail turned back into the cypress grove and made her way through it toward the cliff, coming out upon the edge of the latter a short distance south of the trail. She stood there, on the verge of tears, with the sun-brilliant ocean at her feet. It was a dead world that she saw, for hope had risen in her breast and died again.

Suddenly, a voice hailed her.

"Hello, old dear! Wouldn't they take you with 'em?"

CHAPTER XIX

CONSPIRACY

THE voice was ironical in tone. It came from her left. Gail whirled around and saw a girl sitting on a flat boulder in the shadow of one of the largest of the cypresses, a dozen yards or so away. She was smoking a cigarette and regarding Gail with a look of amusement and curiosity in her worldly-wise eyes. Gail returned her frank inspection with interest, annoyed at finding herself under observation.

The girl was a sophisticated-looking creature, extremely pretty in a hard, artificial sort of way. Her hair was bobbed and blonde and elaborately marcelled. She wore flesh-

colored silk stockings and a bizarrely-patterned sport suit which became her well. Her eyebrows were a thin, dark line and her cheeks and lips suggested artificiality rather than art.

But her eyes were natural—the only natural feature of her face, indeed. They were blue and brilliant and bold, but they were honest, and by their honesty Gail judged her.

"You must have been watching," Gail said calmly.

Cigarette's amusement deepened.

"I was," she admitted frankly. "Couldn't help it, could I? Me up here and you sleuthing them two down there. You'd have done the same yourself, wouldn't you?"

Gail felt that there was more than mere idle curiosity behind the other's interest.

"Perhaps. It doesn't matter. I thought I was alone."

The bold eyes narrowed a trifle.

"You look kind of peaked, honey. Better sit down."

The boulder was long and narrow like a bench. Cigarette moved over invitingly. Gail hesitated for a moment, then she sat down. The girl opened her vanity case, an elaborate affair of crocodile skin, disclosing, among other things, a packet of cigarettes.

"Smoke?" she said hospitably.

"Thanks, I don't," Gail murmured.

"Too bad. You oughter. 'Smoke Kangaroos and be nonchalant,' as the ad says."

There was silence. Gail waited. She had a queer feeling of expectancy. The silence continued. Cigarette seemed at a loss, probably for the first time in her life.

"I suppose they call you Red," she drawled at last.

Gail smiled.

"Not as a rule."

"They oughter, with that mop. Anyways, I'm going to."

Gail relaxed.

"Yes, do. No one ever has."

She looked at Cigarette's corn-colored bob. "I suppose you are——"

"Blondy!" the other grinned. "We know each other now."

She slipped her cigarette over the cliff.

"Say, Red, you are Gail Hollister, aren't you?"

Gail looked at her sharply.

"How do you know?"

Blondy twisted a ring on her finger. Its single brilliant stone was not too obviously spurious.

"I read the papers, and I've been seeing you around here."

"Oh!"

Gail had forgotten that she had become a front-page celebrity in picture as well as in prose.

"What about it?" she asked curtly.

The bold eyes were inscrutable. "You've had a pretty tough time of it, haven't you?"

"Perhaps."

Blondy looked out to sea.

"The odds," she went on slowly, "seem to be against this feller O'Neil the cops are chasin'."

Gail's cheeks began to flame.

"Mr. O'Neil had nothing to do with it!" she declared emphatically. "Stark killed Conniston and Dimity! We have new evidence——"

She stopped abruptly, angry with herself for defending Kerry to this girl. Who was she? What right had she to question her?

Blondy sensed the rising storm.

"Now, don't you get het up, dearie! You have to stand by your man! Besides, I'm not saying he done it!"

"You believe he did, like the rest of them!" Gail cried passionately.

"Well, you know what the papers say. You see, I don't know your man; you do! It makes all the dif. Anyhow, you got to stand by him, whether he done it or not. Why don't

you tell me about it—about him? It helps to get a thing off your chest."

There was sympathy in Blondy's tone. Gail softened and looked at her steadily for a moment.

"There is something behind your interest," she said candidly. "What is it?"

Blondy waved an airy hand.

"Maybe there is, Red. Never mind, now. Go ahead!"

GAIL pondered. There was something likable about this uncultivated girl. Perhaps it was her honesty, her complete lack of dissimulation; she did not know. But whatever it was, she was inclined to follow the suggestion, for she longed to unburden herself to one of her own sex—to get it "off her chest," as Blondy put it.

She felt that Blondy might understand in a sense that Perrin and Doctor McEwan could not. And how she longed for someone who could believe in Kerry as intensely as she did herself!

So Gail told her new friend what there was to tell, every tiny irrelevant incident of it, with the exception of what she had overhead on the beach twenty minutes before. Only that did she keep to herself. The telling was effectively done, with a proper emphasis on the high lights of the affair, such as her love for Kerry and her faith in him, and the mystery of Dimity and the villainy of Stark.

"That's all," Gail said, when she had done.

Blondy looked at her wistfully.

"Lord! I wish somebody loved me as you do that Kerry O'Neil of yours!"

Then her face hardened rather terribly.

"No, I don't! I hate men! They are a pack of wolves, the lot of 'em!"

Gail had her own opinion as to this and expressed it.

"Some of them, yes," she admitted cautiously. "Stark, for instance. But you haven't seen Kerry O'Neil."

Blondy laughed shortly.

"I'd like to."

Her face softened again.

"Maybe you are right. Do you know, Red, I've got a hunch this Kerry O'Neil of yours is straight."

"Have you?" Gail whispered ecstatically. "Have you? I've been longing to hear someone say that! Do you mean it, Blondy?"

"I guess so. I like the way you tell it. But this bird Stark, now; are you sure he's the one you want?"

"Certainly! Who else could it be?"

"Oh, I guess you are right. Stark was there, of course; but I just wondered if he done the dirty work. It looks kind of funny finding that piece of Dimity's coat sleeve on the vault door. Still, Dimity couldn't have killed himself."

"I think it was put there," Gail said, giving expression to her latest theory.

Blondy nodded.

"Maybe. There's nothing new about a frame-up. I wish you'd tell me the rest of it, Red."

Gail stared at her.

"What do you mean?"

"Why did you trail those two men up the cliff?"

Gail frowned. She had not intended to say anything about what she had overheard to anyone until she had seen Doctor McEwan. But as she looked into Blondy's worldly-wise eyes she felt that the girl was on her side and that she wanted to help her.

"Why are you asking me these questions?" she demanded suddenly.

Blondy looked at her steadily.

"I've got a hunch I can help you."

"Help me to prove Stark guilty!" Gail was incredulous.

"Maybe. I don't know. You'll have to tell me the rest of it first."

Gail fell silent.

"Don't, if you'd rather not."

"I will tell you!" Gail cried, suddenly making up her mind. "I never saw those two men until half an hour ago. They were talking. I heard what they said; they saw Dimity killed!"

Gail repeated what she had overheard, her voice rising hysterically.

"They saw who did it and they haven't told the police. They don't intend to! They don't care if Kerry hangs! You were right. Men *are* wolves! I've got to make them tell what they saw, Blondy, and I don't know how to do it!"

Gail began to weep. Blondly put her arm around the trembling shoulders and drew the girl to herself. Blondy's face changed oddly. It seemed to harden and tighten behind its mask of artificiality; her lips drew down into a thin red line.

"So Nick saw who done it!" she muttered.

Gail stopped crying; she flung up her head, her eyes wide.

"'Nick,' you said! Nick who? Do you know them?"

Blondy nodded.

"Pretty well; both of 'em. Joe Daniels, the little one, and Nick Kessler, the big one. They hang around the Croc a lot."

GAIL stared at her in wonder.

"The Croc?" she echoed.

"Uh-huh! The Green Crocodile."

Blondy jerked her head toward the end of the point.

"I'm there, too."

"You mean you live there?"

Blondy smiled crookedly.

"Yes, in a way. I come up here once in a while to get away from it. Men! Ugh! I hate 'em. I'm an entertainer, Red."

"An entertainer!"

Gail was confused by the term.

"Yes. I dance with the men that haven't partners. There's good money in it and it isn't as fierce as it sounds, by a long shot. These jobs are what you make 'em, you know. As good or as bad as you want 'em to be. Not that I'm any lily-white angel! Not me!" Blondy added.

"I see," Gail said uncertainly.

"Now these two birds you are after," Blondy went on calmly. "You'll never shake it out of 'em. They are rum-runners. Bad eggs, both of 'em. Nick Kessler would hang his own grandmother if it paid him! I know him! He's bad! *Bad!*"

Gail was struck by an odd note in Blondy's tone.

"You seem to—— Who are you, anyway?" she asked sharply.

Blondy laughed.

"Me! I'm Mrs. Nick Kessler."

Gail sprang to her feet, white with anger.

"You—his wife! You got me to tell you everything you wanted to know! And now you are going to warn him!"

Completely losing control of herself, she advanced upon Blondy with clenched hands and spots of scarlet on her white cheeks.

"Aw, sit down!" Blondly cried wearily. "What's a husband between friends! This is California. I got my decree a month ago. Sit down, Red!"

Gail found her temper almost as quickly as she had lost it.

"I'm sorry," she cried contritely. "I don't know what I'm saying."

Blondy nodded understandingly.

"S'all right, old dear! I get that way myself, at times. Nerves, and the hectic life, I guess. Kessler made my life a hell. Never mind why I married him. I'm through with him. And I want to help you."

She lit a cigarette.

"Kessler is bad," she repeated.

"Threats wont scare him. We must get him some other way."

"Daniels?" Gail suggested.

Daniels don't count. Kessler is your man. But he'll stick at nothing. Nothing!" she added significantly. "Remember that! He'd have done for Conniston himself if he could have put his hand on them stones. They must be worth a pile of money," she added reflectively.

Gail shivered.

"Do you happen to know just what they were doing down on the beach the other night?"

"Nick has been in bootleg for some time. He and Daniels and a man named Swanson. They've been running it in around here under the noses of the revenue men. A good deal of it goes to the Green Croc. Those green lights you saw would be on Swanson's power boat, I guess, and the pile of driftwood was intended for a signal fire to tell him to come in somewhere else. Down toward the point, maybe.

"That Kerry of yours and those cops put a crimp in their plans. I guess they were giving their old stamping grounds the once-over just now. Naturally, Nick is sore. I'm no snuff-hound myself, but I'd like to punch him in the eye just for old times' sake."

And with this pious reflection Blondy resumed her cigarette. Gail tried to think her way through the problem that confronted her. But she found herself in a sort of mental cul-de-sac from which there was no escape, save by the way she had come. And that meant retreat. And retreat meant throwing away the most promising clue they had yet found and starting afresh. Her brain seemed dead to inspiration and tears of anger welled up in her eyes.

BLONDY had been thinking with the cool deliberation of her type, drawing on her cigarette, looking seaward, the clear artificiality of her face unmarred by line or wrinkle. Suddenly, her expression enlivened, her eyes began to dance. She gave Gail a long, searching look.

"Say, Red, how far will you go for this Kerry O'Neil of yours?"

"The limit," Gail said simply.

"Hm! I wonder!"

Blondy drew skeptically on her cigarette. Gail flushed.

"I will, I tell you!"

"Uh-huh! Well, listen. I have an idea. You have the looks to put it over, but it'll take nerve. I'm wondering if you've got the——" Blondy paused, and delicately sought a word—"the innards."

"Of course I have! What is it, Blondy?"

Gail was all eagerness.

"Hm! We'll see. Kessler is crazy about girls. New girls, swell girls, good-looking girls. Maybe that's why he married me. But his special is red-headed girls, like you. Well, Nick likes his booze; too darn much for a man in his line. He hangs around the Green Croc a good deal. He drinks there and when he's drunk he talks. He talks too much.

"Now, here's what I'm getting at. They want another entertainer at the Croc. One of the girls left last week. If I speak to Jim Beasley he'll give you the job, if you'll take it. If you do, I'll steer Nick onto you, not that he'll need much steering! He'll drink and it will be up to you to make him say what you want him to say. I'll show you where to take him, and I'll stick around out of sight, but near enough to overhear what he says. I can work that part of it, if you've the nerve to tackle Nick. When you want me, I'll be your witness. How about it, Red?"

Gail listened to this extraordinary proposal in consternation. Was the girl actually suggesting that she en-

ter a questionable roadhouse as an entertainer, a term apparently as elastic as one chose to make it? Did she think that she, Gail Hollister, would use such charms as were hers to entice evidence out of a beast?

For the moment she quite forgot what was at stake.

"In a place like that!" she exclaimed in horror. "I couldn't! Oh, I couldn't!"

Blondy contemptuously flipped away the stub of her cigarette.

"Scared, eh!" she drawled. "I thought so."

If Blondy had used a whip on Gail the effect would not have been more startling. She sprang to her feet, white to the lips. For a moment so intense was her feeling that she could not speak.

"Don't you dare say that to me!" she cried passionately. "I didn't think what I was saying. Of course I'll do it! I'll do anything that will give Kerry a chance!"

Blondy waved her hand.

"I thought you would, old dear. I know just how you feel. Sit down and we'll talk it over."

Gail subsided. Her cheeks were scarlet with confusion.

"You must think me an awful baby!" she cried unhappily. "I hardly know what I'm saying. I'll do anything, anything at all! But will it work out as you think?"

"Don't see why it shouldn't, if you play up to Nick."

"I will! What about Daniels?"

"Daniels is a rat. He'll say anything Nick says. If you get it out of Nick, the police will get it out of Daniels. I know them birds!"

"Are you sure you can get me on? Wont it hurt you—afterward?"

"Jim Beasley will do it for me, if I ask him. It wont hurt me. I'm leaving him next month."

"What shall I have to do?" Gail asked breathlessly.

The scheme had fired her imagination.

"Oh, nothing much. These jobs are what you make 'em, as I just said. Look pretty, use your eyes a bit, and dance with the men when they ask you. It isn't nearly as tough as it sounds. They'll ask you to drink, but you don't need to if you don't want to. When Nick shows up keep away from the others and let him drink all he'll take. Then he'll begin to tell you things. I know Nick. Leave the rest to me."

BLONDY opened her vanity case and took out the cigarettes.

"Did you never smoke, Red?"

Gail recalled one or two furtive experiments.

"I have tried it," she admitted.

"Better practice up. A hot cig is mighty handy when a man gets fresh."

Gail laughed nervously and took the cigarettes and matches. Blondy eyed her critically as she proceeded to light one of the cubes.

"You'll do," was her comment. "But I'll have to doll you up a bit. More rouge on your cheeks and higher up, lips redder, hair confined —no, we'll leave it free. Gee, kid!" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "You'll be a reg'lar red-headed devil! Nick'll go crazy about you!"

Gail blushed at this unstinted praise.

"It's awfully good of you, Blondy!" she said earnestly. "I'll never forget you for it."

"Oh, piffle! I want to get back at Nick. Just remember you are going to put it over. You can, if you will. It'll take brains, but you got 'em, Red. This is Friday. How about starting in tonight? Nick won't be on hand till tomorrow. Big doings Saturday nights. But the extra day will give you a chance to get your hand in."

"Tonight, yes!" Gail acquiesced. "I want to get a few of my things first, though. Where shall I meet you?"

"Right here."

Blondy looked at her wrist watch. "It's three now. Be here at five. I have a coop parked back in the grove. I'll run up to the Croc now and speak to Joe about you; then I'll come back and drive you down. Don't worry about an evening gown. I've a green silk rag that'll make you look like a million dollars. Shall I run you back to the house?"

"Better not," Gail said. "Bartlett might stop us."

They talked for a minute or two longer. Then Gail followed Blondy through the trees to a clearing in the center of the cypress grove in which her tiny "coop" was parked. A trail of sorts led out through the trees into the dirt road. The little car coughed and barked as Blondy gave it the gas.

"Five o'clock, old dear!" she called back, waving her hand. "Don't forget to practice up on them cigarettes."

The coupé shot out into the road and presently vanished in the direction of the Green Crocodile, as Kessler's car had an hour or so before.

CHAPTER XX

THE GREEN CROCODILE

THE dust settled down in the road again and Gail found herself alone. Rather enormously alone, for Blondy left behind her a void that filled slowly. In her hand was the packet of cigarettes which she had forgotten to return. She eyed it resentfully, seeing in it a symbol of the distasteful course of action to which she had committed herself.

But as she stood there thinking about the rôle she had undertaken to play, her attitude toward it changed. She began to see it as something daring and colorful, as requiring all her wit and courage, as an exciting means to a very definite end—an end so desirable, so rich in its promise that her heart sang with joy.

Gail smiled to herself. Again she wondered if she were indeed the Gail Hollister who had come down from the Westcoast Museum five days before.

As Gail made her way down the trail and along the beach her thoughts were of Kerry and the ease with which he had evaded Bartlett and his men. How he had managed to do it was still as incomprehensible to her as ever, but she no longer feared for his safety.

Her contact with Blondy's exuberant personality had steadied her nerve. She was certain that everything would be well.

Mrs. Wessels was waiting for Gail at the top of the summer-house trail. She seemed vastly relieved at sight of her.

"Is there any word of Mr. O'Neil?" Gail asked.

"There isn't, Miss 'Ollister. Bartlett has been looking for you, though. Hopping mad, 'e is, too. He says you ought never to 'ave left the house."

"Why not?"

Mrs. Wessels was surprised at the question.

"Dimity's inquest, of course," she said. "They are 'olding it at six o'clock. Bartlett says you must be there."

Gail stopped abruptly. "The inquest!" She had completely forgotten about it.

They would want her, of course, and she was to meet Blondy at five. If she went on into the house she might not be allowed to leave it until after the inquest! She thought of

turning back. Then she saw one of Bartlett's men in the patio.

HIS attitude was meant to suggest that he was unaware of her presence. Nevertheless, she felt sure that he was watching her. She must go on into the house and trust to her wits to get her out of it again, unobserved.

"What is it, dearie?" Mrs. Wessels inquired solicitously.

"Nothing. Is Doctor McEwan here?"

"I 'aven't seen 'im all afternoon."

They entered by way of the patio door. Gail slipped up to her room unnoticed.

She had realized that her stay at the Green Crocodile might extend over several nights? She gathered together a nightdress and toilet articles and wrapped them in a sheet of brown paper which she found in the clothes closet, tying the parcel with a piece of string. A reassuring glance in the mirror and she was ready.

Quietly she opened the door and listened. No sound. Creeping to the top of the stairs, she listened again, then cautiously descended them. There was no one in the hall. Mrs. Wessels moved in her kitchen. The murmur of voices came to her from behind the library door.

Her plan was to cut across the patio, fly down the cliff path, and descend to the beach by the summer-house trail. Once there, she would be reasonably safe. To reach the beach unseen was her problem.

THERE was no one in the patio. She flew across it like the wind, gained the cliff path, and stopped. No one pursued her. She heard no command to return. Her spirits rose and she fled down the path, neared the summer-house, and turned to the head of the cliff trail.

And there her high hopes fell into ruin. A man sprang from behind the summer-house. A hand of steel closed on her wrist.

"Not so fast, Hollister! Not so fast!"

It was Decker.

Gail shrank back from him.

"How dare you!" she cried indignantly. "Take your hand off my wrist!"

Decker snickered.

"Not just yet, my girl. We'll go back to the house, first!"

"Let me go!" Gail stormed. "You have no right to stop me! Let me go!"

She tried to wrench herself free. Decker's grip tightened cruelly; his eyes brightened with malice.

"Keep still," he snarled, "or I'll put the bracelets on you! Come on!"

To resist would only make matters worse. Gail knew that he would like nothing better than an excuse to carry out his threat.

In despair, she permitted him to lead her submissively back to the house. As he followed her upstairs she had to shut her eyes to keep the tears from streaming down her cheeks.

Decker stopped before her door and took the key out of the lock; then he pushed her into the room.

"Stay there until you are wanted!" he growled.

Slamming the door, he locked it.

Gail dragged herself to the bed and with a choking cry dropped helplessly upon it. The parcel slipped from beneath her arm and she covered her face with her hands.

For a little while she remained thus, her shoulders trembling. Then she raised her head and glanced at her watch. It was just four-thirty. She had promised to meet Blondy at five! Her despair turned to fury, which focused itself upon Decker, and she had to bite her lip and

clench her hands to keep herself from giving hysterical expression to it.

She got up and tried the door, beat upon it with her fists. Then she began to pace the room with quick, nervous steps. The watch on her wrist showed a quarter of five. She stopped by the window. It was open and she passed out onto the balcony and stared down into the grounds.

There were several cars parked in front of the house, but no one occupied any of them. Nor did she see anyone in the grounds. She grew calmer and began to think.

Just then a powerful roadster driven by a young man shot out of the tree-hemmed drive, swept around the lawn, and skidded to a standstill in front of the house. Leaving the engine purring, the young man sprang out, carrying a dispatch case, and hurried up to the front door. Gail supposed that he was a messenger of some sort. She heard him wield the knocker.

"He's left the engine running," Gail muttered to herself.

SUDDENLY, a thought struck her. She was instantly on fire with it; her eyes blazed. Whirling around, she rushed back into the room, snatched up the brown paper parcel and flew out onto the balcony again. There was still no one in sight.

Below the balcony was the sloping, red-tiled roof of the conservatory. An immense bougainvillea vine embraced the roof, its profusion of magenta blooms reaching up to the low balcony wall.

Another swift glance around the grounds, then Gail dropped over the wall and slid down the sloping roof, clutching desperately at the wiry branches of the vine. The blooms rose like butterflies on the wing.

She gained the edge of the roof, soiled but safe, and let her feet hang over the eaves. A terrifying drop of some fifteen feet into a bed of scarlet geraniums lay below her. Gail did not hesitate.

Dropping the parcel, she gritted her teeth, swung over the edge, and let go.

The soft earth broke the force of her fall, and Gail rose unhurt among the shattered plants. Glancing breathlessly around, she picked up her parcel and started toward the purring car a dozen yards or so away.

Half the distance had she covered when a man emerged from the driveway on the other side of the lawn. It was the man who had watched her from the patio a little while before. He seemed to divine her purpose, for he started across the lawn, shouting.

In a flash, Gail made up her mind. Flying across the intervening distance, she tossed the parcel into the seat of the roadster and sprang in after it. Her feet found the clutch and the gas throttle; the roadster roared around the circular drive, and swift as a comet sped to the entrance of the lower drive, which led direct to the highway.

The man on the lawn had stopped. He was shouting and waving his hand. Gail smiled triumphantly and settled low in the seat behind the wheel; and then, as a pistol cracked and a bullet bit the dust at the side of the car, her smile lost its quality of triumph. A second bullet whined over her head; a third ricocheted from the steel frame of the windshield.

Gail swung the car into the highway on two wheels, escaping destruction by inches, and straightened it out. Her face was white, but her hands were firm on the wheel and she was still smiling.

Ahead, the road was clear as far as she could see, some three miles or so. Her foot depressed the throttle again,

and she looked at the fluttering indicator of the speedometer with a thrill of exultation.

Fifty, it registered. Then fifty-five, fifty-eight! The wind made a Viking's song in her ears. Her hair stood out from her head like a hammer of gold.

The dirt road was fair and the car was winged; a demon of speed rioted in her blood. Nevertheless, she did not permit her ecstasy to blind her to the issues at stake. Bartlett's man had probably started in pursuit already.

There was only one road, the one she was on. How could she evade capture? Every second counted. She thought quickly and hard. And then a way occurred to her. There was no other, so far as she knew.

To drive up to the Green Crocodile in the commandered car was out of the question. She must get rid of it, hide it somewhere, quickly.

Some two miles ahead was a bend and a rise in the road. On the other side was the cypress grove in which she had promised to meet Blondy. A car would have started in pursuit already, she felt sure. If she could back the roadster into the clearing in which Blondy had parked her coupé, before the pursuing car topped the rise, her chances of escaping were fairly good.

The cypress grove, as a possible hiding-place, would not occur to the deputies until she was safely within the questionable confines of the Green Crocodile. They would never think of looking for her there.

Her faith in Blondy was implicit. It simply did not occur to Gail to doubt the sincerity of her new friend. To the seriousness of what she was doing, its illegal aspect, she gave no thought whatever.

A pistol cracked somewhere behind her.

Gail gripped the wheel a little more firmly and cast a quick glance over her shoulder. A car was some two miles behind. On the brown dirt road it looked like a huge black beetle. The beetle swelled a little and Gail knew that it was gaining.

PURRING as with a sense of achievement, the roadster, under Gail's deft pilotage, took the rise in the road and topped the crest at diminished speed. A quarter of a mile ahead were the cypress trees, and coming from the opposite direction was Blondy's coupé.

Gail's heart began to hammer against her ribs, but she kept her hand steady on the wheel. She had perhaps two minutes in which to complete her strategy.

Completely hidden from those in the car behind, the roadster swept down the rise like an arrow of silver and streaked past the cypress grove.

Gail flung on the brakes. The car rocked from side to side of the road and came to a shuddering standstill, enveloped in billowing clouds of dust.

As she tugged at the gear shift, Gail had a vision of Blondy's tense face in the coupé ahead. Reversing, she shot the roadster back into and along the trail which led to the clearing.

Again the roadster stopped, enshrouded by the fretted shadows flung by the conifers.

Gail waited, gripping the wheel so tightly that her knuckles gleamed white. The seconds were little hammers of time that beat on the anvil of her heart. Would Blondy have the presence of mind not to betray her by any manifestation of dismay or astonishment? She sat rigid in the seat, the breath hissing between her clenched teeth.

There came the roar of a powerful engine behind her. It beat on her eardrums like artillery fire. A streak of black whizzed past. It had gone!

Gail fell back against the leather upholstery, shuddering at the narrowness of her escape. She heard the staccato bark of Blondy's coupé and the little machine rattled into the clearing.

Pulling herself together, she glanced at the watch on her wrist. It was just five o'clock. The last fifteen minutes had seemed as many hours. Blondy stopped her coupé and put her head out of the window.

"Well," she said, with a grin, "you beat 'em to it. What were you making?"

Gail picked up her parcel and got out of the car.

"S-sixty!" she gasped, halfway between tears and laughter.

"Pretty good on that road, I'll say! What's the bright idea?"

Gail explained in a hurried word or two. Blondy grasped the situation in a flash.

"Jump in!" she exclaimed. "The sooner we get to the Croc the better. They'll come back quickly."

Gail put her foot on the running board. Then she looked up at the sophisticated face above her.

"You are taking a big risk, Blondy," she said unsteadily. "You oughtn't to. If Bartlett should hear of it——"

"Slush!" Blondy said eloquently. "Who cares if he does! I'm tickled to death to get a poke at Nick! Jump in!"

Gail obeyed, near to tears now, and fell into silence. Blondy backed the coupé out into the road, swung it around, and turned it in the direction of the Green Crocodile. Then she shot the little car ahead at a speed that seemed to threaten its extinction and theirs.

"I'll never forget what you are doing, Blondy," Gail said huskily, between bumps.

Blondy squeezed her hand.

"Piffle! I seen Jim Beasley about you. He said to bring you along. He's a good egg, Jim is, but hard-boiled. He'll give you the job all right, but don't tell him you haven't had experience in the game. Talk to him as if you had a million dollars on your back. I'll show you the layout when we get there.

"You can get away with it, all right. That red hair of yours will carry you anywheres. And don't be afraid of Nick. Stick a cig in his eye if he gets fresh. The bunch will stand by you. Nobody loves Nick around there."

BUT Gail's narrow escape had unnerved her. She was beginning to lose confidence in herself, and she accepted these instructions in silence.

Was she capable of filling this rôle she had undertaken to play? Had she within her that quality of dissimulation essential to success?

To Blondy, the rôle of siren—how she hated the word—would come as naturally as tea and toast.

But to Gail Hollister, authority on matters of antiquity, the venture was at best an exploration into the unknown regions of her own personality.

There was another thing, too. Was Blondy's inspiration as practical as she seemed to think?

Gail was too upset in her mind to actually detect any weaknesses in it; nevertheless, she sensed their existence, and, because she could not grasp and examine them, feared them the more.

Then she drew herself up sharp, shocked at the trend of her thought. If she continued in this frame of mind she would fail as surely as the sun would rise tomorrow! Something like the courage of desperation came to her. She wasn't going to fail. She was going to "put it over," as Blondy had said.

Some ten minutes later the little

coupé rattled into the cypress-shadowed courtyard of the Green Crocodile at the end of the point.

Gail looked at the notorious roadhouse curiously. She saw a large two-story wooden building painted a deep bottle-green, octagon in shape, with large glass-enclosed verandas and small windows with green shades discreetly drawn.

The house commanded a magnificent sweep of peninsula and ocean from every side. It stood in the center of several acres of ground which were enclosed by a high board fence, also painted green.

Above the house sprawled a huge electric sign shaped like a crocodile, the lights of which were green. An ingeniously devised reflector was so placed as to deflect much of the light of the sign from the grounds below.

The gardens were laid out in shrubbery, fairly well kept. Here and there were nooks and arbors discreetly embowered with vine and creeper. Equally discreet was the disposal of the lights set here and there in the grounds.

The place had a raffish air. It seemed to wink at one with its tongue in its cheek, so to speak, like a discreetly inebriated elderly gentleman who is more at home in the concealing shadows of night than in the brilliant light of day.

A side door led them into a bizarrely-furnished office. The floor was covered with a Persian rug. Several oil paintings of exciting incidents in horse races hung on the walls. Near a window stood a colossal antique desk; behind it sprawled a man.

He held a cigarette between his lean, yellow, hairless fingers; the heels of his patent-leather shoes were set on the edge of the desk.

"'Lo, Jim," Blondy said casually. "Meet my friend, Red Burns."

Gail started at this unexpected *nom de plume*. It had not occurred to her that she must go under any name but her own while she was at the Green Crocodile. Recovering herself, she smiled inwardly at Blondy's inventive genius.

The man behind the desk deposited his feet on the floor. He seemed to be running his eyes up and down Blondy, as if he were estimating the potentialities of that sophisticated person.

Thinking herself unobserved, Gail stole a look at the man. She saw a curious figure.

His face was wrinkled like the skin of a last year's apple. Whether by dissipation or premature old age Gail could not tell. His eyes, frosty blue in color, were shrewd and penetrating in expression. His figure was slight and stooped, but supple and wiry, and it was clad in a brown tweed suit of generous pattern.

Gail judged that he had an acid tongue and that his years were anywhere between forty and sixty.

"Burns, eh?" the man shrilled, seeming to glance at Blondy's hair. "Pretty good! Where'd you grab off that name?"

He stuck a thin claw of a hand out at Gail, apparently still keeping his eyes on Blondy, however. She stared at it for an instant, then, covered with confusion, shook it limply. The man was cross-eyed! He had been sizing her up all the time, not Blondy!

SHE recalled Blondy's instructions to talk to the man "as if you had a million dollars on your back," and she looked down at him boldly.

"What's wrong with my name?" she drawled with a downward twist of one corner of her mouth. "Don't you like it?"

Gail was aware of the tempered warmth in Blondy's smile. Her confidence returned; then a gust of courage, fierce and exultant, ran hot

through her veins. She was going to put it over!

Beasley cackled again.

"Like it!" he wheezed. "Sure, I like it. Why shouldn't I? Smoke?"

He extended a silver cigarette case and matches.

Gail nodded, casually took one of the cubes, and slowly, deliberately, lit it, staring boldly down at Beasley the while.

"Well, do you want me, or not?"

She breathed cigarette smoke through her nostrils.

Beasley, via Blondy, gave her that up-and-down look again.

"Can you dance?"

"Can she!" said Blondy.

"Can I!" drawled Gail. "Got a victrola handy?"

"Oh, never mind now. I'll spot you quick enough if you can't!"

Again that cackling laugh.

"Like men?"

"Eat 'em alive!" Gail said.

Once more that glow of warmth in Blondy's eyes.

"Ever worked in a roadhouse before?"

"Like to know where I ain't worked in this line."

"Tough as they make 'em!" muttered Beasley, "Don't look it, either. How old are you, Red?"

"Never mind. I'm no spring chicken."

"I guess not," Beasley agreed. "That cigarette case," he went on, meaningly, "is mine."

Gail grinned impudently.

"Sorry!" she said cheerfully. Taking the cigarette case out of the pocket of her sweater into which she had slipped it, she handed it back to him.

"I guess I thought it was mine, Jim. I am that way sometimes. It's my complex. When do I start?"

"Start!" Beasley cackled. "Who said you'd ever start?"

Gail shrugged indifferently. "I gotta know now. Gotta line on something else."

Beasley gave her a long, hard look, then he began to grin. "You'll do!" he said. "You'll do!"

"How much?" Gail drawled.

Beasley frowned.

"I'll tell you Sunday night. I want to see you do your stuff first. I pay straight salary. And listen, Red."

He paused.

"I'm running no Sunday-school class, but a girl don't have to stand for any more than she wants to, and sometimes less! *Less!* Get me? Blondy, show her where to put her rags. And put her wise!"

Gail shrugged her lissom shoulders and tossed her copper-red head.

"I'll tell papa if they get fresh."

CHAPTER XXI

REHEARSAL

THE door through which they emerged a moment later opened upon a narrow hall. No sooner had Gail closed it behind her than Blondy spun around, eyes dancing, caught the other in her arms, and executed a little jazz step with her.

"Great!" she whispered ecstatically. "You certainly put it over old Jim! Come on, Kid!"

Flushed with her minor triumph, Gail followed Blondy up a flight of stairs to a corridor with doors on each side of it. Blondy indicated some of them, commenting:

"Rooms for private parties."

She stopped before a door at the upper end of the corridor, unlocked it, and entered. Gail followed her.

The room was airy and prettily furnished. There were two single beds.

"This is my hangout, Red. Make yourself at home. The girl that left useter room with me."

"What a pretty room!" Gail ex-

claimed. "And what a view you have!"

She went to the window. It commanded a measureless stretch of blazing sea.

The sun was dipping and there was in the atmosphere that warm tint which precedes the richer hues of sunset.

"Not so bad!" was Blondy's comment. "I'll be kind of sorry to leave it. I sit here sometimes when I get sick of the bunch."

"Do you really think I bluffed him?" Gail asked eagerly as she turned away from the window.

"Do I!" Blondy grinned. "Never saw him take anything better. Oh, you'll put it over, all right. If you can bluff Jim Beasley you can bluff the rest of the gang, take it from me! I nearly died when you swiped his cigarette case!"

"That was an inspiration," Gail smiled. "What time do we go down?"

"About nine."

"Beasley said you would 'put me wise,'" Gail went on.

Blondy chuckled.

"There isn't much to it. You just hang around the floor and dance with whoever wants you to."

"With or without introductions?"

"It doesn't matter. We are not particular here. I'll give you a knockdown to one or two of the boys. That'll make it easier. Treat 'em gentle and you'll get by. If they want to tip you, let them. It would not seem right to refuse real money. Don't drink if you don't want to. You can always slop it into a palm."

"Isn't the place ever raided?" Gail inquired.

"Oh, once in a while, but Jim knows about it beforehand, usually. The Croc is kind of hard to get into."

They sat down by the window, Blondy chatting in animated tones.

PRESENTLY, the sun began to set. Soon it was gone into the fiery breast of the ocean, and the ocean, fiery no longer, began to darken until it seemed like a cauldron of molten metal a-quiver here and there with sinister spear heads of light. Darkness gathered.

Blondy began to tell Gail something of her married life with Kessler, of the brutalities and the infidelities of the man, and something of the varied and colorful and frequently vulgar experiences of her career.

Gail was intensely interested in the girl and she began to study her closely. The result was a revelation in character that astonished her.

Beneath the surface artificiality of the girl she found something solid and clean and vital, something that held her a little breathless, as the discovery of a vein of yellow gold in a rock facing would have done.

Moreover, she glimpsed an aspect of life that was quite foreign to her: a sub-world of dark shadows and brillant lights, of hurts and heartbreaks and morbid despondencies.

It amazed and awed her and left her, when Blondy had finished, a little more tolerant of human frailty.

"If I'd had a man like that Kerry O'Neil of yours to love," Blondy said, with a crooked grin, "things might have been different!"

Gail pressed her hand gently.

"You will have some day," she said simply. "You are too good not to."

Blondy's mood changed again.

"I wonder where he has gone, Red? It don't seem possible that he could have gone off the peninsula. I know them cops!"

Gail's face grew troubled again.

"I don't know. I can't think. But somehow I've a feeling he is safe."

It was dark now.

Blondy stood up, drew the shade and switched on the light.

"Eight o'clock, Red. Time to doll up."

She went to a clothes closet and took out two evening gowns, a black chiffon and a green georgette, and laid them upon the bed.

"What a darling gown!" Gail cried, with her eyes on the green georgette.

"Slip into it, old dear. It is just the rag for you. Here's a green slip to go 'nderneath."

Flushed with excitement, Gail tumbled out of her things, put on the slip, and stepped into the green gown.

Nearly as excited as she, Blondy caught the snappers with trembling fingers; then she tossed Gail a pair of green chiffon silk stockings and dainty slippers to match.

Gail drew on the stockings, rolled them, stepped into the slippers, and stood up, eyes shining. Blondy studied her with critical appreciation.

"Wait!"

Cosmetics, perfumes, and toilet articles stood on the dressing-table. Blondy took up comb and brush, pressed Gail down into a chair, and applied them to her copper-red head. Then she took up chamois and rouge and lipstick.

"Not too much, Blondy!" Gail giggled.

"Leave it to me, old dear. You oughter have your eyebrows plucked, but I guess you'll get by."

She dabbed deftly at Gail's cheekbones. The contrast of the color against the white of her skin emphasized the tiny hollows below the cheekbones which the strain of the last few days had rather clearly defined.

Blondy sprang back and with the critical eye of the artist inspected her handiwork. She nodded her satisfaction.

"You'll do."

Gail ran to the mirror. She saw a glowing, exotic figure with shining eyes and hair like a ruddy rippling flame rising white and straight and slender from a sheath of tender green —a sheath so scant and daring that Gail caught her breath.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Is it really I?"

"Sure is!" Blondy asserted generously. "You look like a queen. Wait till Nick sees you!"

BLONDY began her own elaborate toilet in front of the mirror. She completed it swiftly and effectively and slipped into the black chiffon, drew on filmy hose to match, and stepped into black pumps with tiny silver buckles.

Then she stood up, a slim and gaudy goddess as immodestly lovely as artful modesty could make her.

Gail inspected her from twinkling buckles to mop of hair, like ripe corn in the summer sun.

"You look stunning in that black chiffon, Blondy!" she cried warmly.

Blondy ran a critical eye down the scanty gown, which terminated at the knee, and inspected her silken ankles.

"Uh-huh!" she admitted frankly. "This rag usually knocks 'em cold."

She picked up a silver cigarette case with a slender chain and slipped it over her wrist. Another, not unlike it, she gave to Gail.

"All set, honey. Come on."

They passed into the corridor and along a short hall which brought them onto a railed balcony crowded with dinner tables spread with snowy linen and a-gleam with silver. Dim green lights and potted palms lent an air of seclusion to each table. Here and there a waiter deftly perfected the spotless elegance of the tables.

Along the walls were booths built out onto the balcony. Curtains were hung to draw across them. Blondy directed Gail's attention to the booths.

"You and Nick will park in one of

them tomorrow night," she said. "I'll fix it so that I can get the one behind. Leave that part of it to me."

Again Gail had a twinge or doubt as to the practicalness of their plan. She put it out of her mind, however. Faith was half the battle.

A broad staircase led down to the first floor and as they slowly descended it Gail got a comprehensive view of the place.

She saw a large and gleaming dance floor with a platform for the orchestra in one corner of it. Six musicians were already tuning up their instruments. Flowers and potted shrubs banked the platform. Many lamps, artfully suspended from the ceiling, shed a greenish shadowy light upon the floor.

Surrounding the floor were dozens of tables at which a few couples were leisurely dining. Palms were discreetly placed among the tables. Roses perfumed the air. The atmosphere of the place was subtle, exotic, enticing.

Gail took in the scene a little breathlessly. It was all new to her, tremendously fascinating and just a little disquieting. But she had that superb confidence in herself which is born of the knowledge of one's own good looks, and she was not afraid.

Easy chairs were placed here and there at the edge of the floor. Several of these were occupied by good-looking girls with an affected air of boredom. They were enticingly dressed and there was something about them that reminded Gail of Blondy. The latter seemed to sense her thoughts, for she waved her hand airily and said:

"Even as you and I, Red."

When they saw Gail their airs of boredom vanished and as the green georgette was recognized an eyebrow or two went up. Gail colored and held her head high. Blondy stopped by one of the girls.

"Meet my pal, Red Burns, Belle," she said, with a grin.

"Hello, innocence," the girl drawled. "How sweet!" Her eyes said: "Look out, you are dangerous!"

Blondy winked.

"She's hard-boiled, Bluebell. Leave her alone."

They passed on.

Blondy stopped by one of the vacant chairs.

"Better stick here for a while," she suggested. "I'll steer somebody easy onto you as soon as I can. He'll be good practice. Hang onto him and you'll be all right for the rest of the night."

Blondy went on and Gail sat down. She felt horribly alone and a trifle panic-stricken. But the feeling quickly passed and she began to take an interest in her surroundings again.

Friday is an off night for the roadhouses and patrons came slowly to the Green Crocodile. Presently, there were a score of diners at the table and as the orchestra broke into a catchy fox-trot several couples began to gyrate around the shadowy floor. Others trickled in and soon a fair scattering shuffled to the strains of Jazz.

Gail had completely lost her self-consciousness by this. Letting her body relax, she assumed the lounging attitude and affected the bored air of the other girls. Two of them had partners and were dancing, and Gail began to wish that someone would approach her.

Many of the women were smoking and Gail casually lighted one of Blondy's cigarettes and puffed on it leisurely, smiling whimsically at the ease with which she had fallen into the rôle she had undertaken to play.

Just then she saw Blondy bearing down upon her with a young man in tow and she began to feel nervous again. But as she got a good look at him she was reassured. He was an

inoffensive-looking young man with a patent-leather head and an immature Bohemian air which he carried with indifferent success. When he saw Gail his mouth fell open and his Bohemian air vanished.

"Golly!" she heard him whisper.

Gail smiled secretively.

"This is Eddie, Red," Blondy said affably. "He'll tell you the rest of it. Wont you, Eddie?"

"Lovatt," breathed the shocked young man.

"Treat him gentle, Red. He'll break."

Blondy departed and the young man stared at Gail abjectly, searching his brain for something to say.

"Golly," he whispered again. "You are a peach."

Gail yawned.

"I know. Let's eat. I'm hungry."

She hadn't had a bite since morning and for some time had been unpleasantly aware of it.

The young man seemed a bit disappointed at the callousness of the suggestion, but he quickly brightened and led Gail to a table, the most secluded he could find.

THE evening passed not without incident. Eddie and Gail danced and dined and danced and smoked and danced again. Eddie forgot to be a Bohemian and fell madly in love with Gail—with her hair, her eyes, the whiteness of her arms, and the green georgette.

He brought forth a silver flask neatly shaped to fit the tip, of which he was pathetically proud; but he quickly put it away again when Gail yawned in his face. Presently, he wanted to hold her hand and Gail let him, to keep him quiet.

Later, they went out into the grounds and Eddie led her into one of the discreet little arbors she had noticed on entering the courtyard with Blondy. It was on the side of the cliff, overlooking a fairy sea.

There was magic in the moonlight and jessamine in the air. So exquisitely beautiful was the night, indeed, that Eddie very naturally forgot to be a perfect gentleman. He took Gail into his arms and tried to kiss her.

The moment was unfortunate. Gail was thinking tenderly of Kerry and when the touch of Eddie's warm hands broke the train of her thought she had to grit her teeth to check her anger.

She was smoking a cigarette, and remembering Blondy's advice, contrived that it should encounter Eddie's ardent lips.

The young man howled.

"Cut it!" Gail said sharply. "I don't feel mushy tonight."

Eddie was contrite at once and earnestly, humbly begged her to marry him. He was so pathetic in his sincerity that Gail was sorry for him.

"Let's go in," she yawned. "I'm cold."

So they danced some more.

About one o'clock Eddie left in his roadster, with the cut-out open. He went reluctantly and under pressure from Gail, who had just declined again to marry him, to go with him, or to give him any hope whatever.

"I'm c o m i n g back tomorrow night!" he had shouted.

And then he had gone, engine roaring, to forget all about her.

The Green Crocodile was deserted of its patrons as Gail crossed the dance floor toward the staircase. It had not been as bad as she had expected.

Things never were, for that matter, she reflected. But the Friday night crowd was not typical. The real test would come tomorrow, Saturday night.

She was aware of footsteps behind

her. It was Jim Beasley. He looked at her critically.

"You'll do," he said approvingly. "But snap it up a bit! More speed! Get me?"

"I do," Gail drawled. "Watch me!"

Beasley nodded. Crossing to a door nearby, he opened it; but instead of entering, he stood on the threshold, talking to someone in the room beyond. Through the door steamed the odors of the kitchen.

Gail saw a long sink at which a man was washing huge stacks of dishes. She had to press her hands to her mouth to stifle the cry that rose to her lips. Her cheeks grew white and the floor rocked beneath her feet.

Beasley passed into the kitchen, then, letting the door swing to. Gail's hands fell to her sides.

The man at the sink was Kerry O'Neil!

(To be concluded.)

Minus the Dragon

Take the dragon from mythology and fairy tale lore, and a large blank would be left. Hercules would be robbed of the honor of stealing the golden apples of the Garden of Hesperides. Brunehild would be left without a guard, and St. George would have no claim to fame.

Bereft of dragons from whom to rescue abducted princesses, gallant heroes of the fairy tales would have had to sit at home biting their thumbs and meditating on the dullness of life.

There were undoubtedly dragons in the old days, lizards with wings, such as the pterodactyl with a wing spread of seventeen feet. Upon this foundation the imaginative fears of man built a towering edifice of legend, huge monsters covering hundreds of yards of ground in some instances, spitting fire and smoke, ejecting poison and slaying elephants. When the dragon felt the approach of years he sloughed his bones and got a new lease of life. These discarded bones being picked up were sold in powder form in the apothecary shops.

The congealed blood of the dragon under the name dragon's blood was used by painters.

When we come to China, however, we find the dragon in high honor.

In the Dragon Empire, artists and sculptors bestow loving care on his image. There are dragon festivals and dragon temples.

The dragon is the great bestower of good, the giver of beneficent rain, and the Emperor is the representative on earth of the honored one.

The Green Parrot

By HARRISON J. HOLT

"AND I tell you it's all rot," said Apperthwaite again.

He spoke sharply. The extra day's delay while the *Esperanza* lay at anchor in the roadstead of Progresso taking on cargo, had shortened all our tempers.

It was a sweltering hot May night. Even on the forward deck, where we sat facing the distant lights of the Yucatan seaport, the land breeze seemed to have lost nothing of its sultriness from its five-mile journey over salt-water.

There still clung to it that penetrating aroma of the tropics which robs so many men of vitality and will-power, of self-restraint and conscience.

But though we were all of us thankful to have come out of the country alive, there were some things besides our hard-won fortunes which we hated to leave there — things which that warm, odorous night-wind brought back to mind.

It emphasized the fact that we were exiles from the land of our adoption; that we had before us the stiff task of making a fresh start. This accounted in large measure, no doubt, for the somewhat serious trend of our talk.

"It beats me," Apperthwaite went on, tossing his half-smoked cigar over the rail and lighting another, "how any man who knew as much as Professor Forbes did could believe in communications from the dying and all such rubbish. I can't understand it."

"You can't, eh?" drawled Varley.

"No," snapped Apperthwaite, "and no sensible man can, either. Everyone knows it's all poppycock."

Varley took several deep pulls at his pipe before answering him.

"It may not be such rot as you think," he said at last. "I, for one, have good reason to believe it isn't."

"You have?" sneered Apperthwaite. "I'd like to know what it is."

"Very well," replied Varley, "I'll tell you."

THIS is the story as he told it in his dry, matter-of-fact voice. It was hardly audible at times above the clamor of cries and whistles that rose from the open hatch aft, where, in the glare of electric lights, a half-naked gang of native stevedores was still busily at work dumping baled hemp into the hold from huge lighters alongside.

NONE of you, I imagine, knew Thornton Wing? I didn't suppose you would. He wasn't much of a hand at making friends. I guess I was the only man in all this God-forsaken country who was at all thick with him, and I hadn't seen much of him since we left college. He went into a lawyer's office afterward, set up for himself later and did splendidly for a while.

Then he made some sort of an unfortunate marriage, with a woman of rather doubtful reputation, I believe. Anyhow, it made a lot of talk and ended unhappily, as such marriages usually do.

Shortly afterward his health gave out and he gave up his law practice and came down here and started a rubber plantation on the Isthmus.

I was astounded when I heard of it; for the Wing I had known was about as well fitted to rough it as a graduate from a young ladies' seminary.

He always reminded me of the human skeleton I once saw at a sideshow, who had a high, narrow forehead, deep-set hazel eyes and no nose or chin to speak of. Only in justice to Wing I should add that the expression of his face was altogether different.

He had plenty of brains, more, in fact, than he quite knew what to do with, it often seemed to me—more, certainly, than his physical make-up warranted.

I didn't think he'd stick it out on the Isthmus six months, but I was wrong. Oddly enough, the life seemed to suit him. I ran across him a year later in Vera Cruz. He'd put on weight and was looking as fit as could be.

I congratulated him on the improvement in his looks and said that I supposed, now he had his health back, he'd be going home soon, but he shook his head.

"I'm going to stay down here," he told me. "I don't believe I shall ever go back."

It was nearly three years before I saw him again, though I heard from him occasionally. He didn't say much in his letters, but I gathered from them that he was still quite content with the life he had chosen. This puzzled me a good deal, for of all the men I knew Wing seemed the least likely to find such an existence tolerable.

I wondered sometimes if he could have taken up with some native woman whom he felt bound to stick to, but it didn't seem in the least probable. Even if his unfortunate marriage hadn't soured him on all women, he wasn't the sort to enter into such a relationship. Whatever might be the explanation of his prolonged stay on the Isthmus, I felt sure it couldn't be that.

THE opportunity came at last for me to pay him a visit—I had been held up by a "norther" at Coatzacoalcos on my way to look over a mahogany concession in San Juan Bautista—and to find out if I could what attraction the place had for him.

His rubber plantation was located on the Tonala River some thirty miles from the little fishing village at its mouth. I reached there at sunset, after a long hard day's ride along the beach from Coatzacoalcos, and hired a couple of Indians to paddle me up the river.

It took us all night to make the trip, for it was hard work forcing the heavy dug-out against the current, and we had to hug the bank pretty closely to make any progress at all.

Tired out as I was after my long horseback ride, I didn't dare close my eyes—the chance of a knife-thrust in the ribs was too great for that; so I sat in the stern and smoked all the way.

Even then I had a hard time keeping awake. There was something hypnotic in the soft swish of the water against the boat, the regular dip-dip of the paddles, the continual mysterious rustling of the overhanging branches. And I was all but asleep when we finally reached Wing's place a little before dawn.

I left my murderous-looking boatmen to make the dug-out fast to the landing-stage and stumbled up the path to the house, a long, low tin-roofed building that stood on higher ground a hundred yards or so from the river amid a grove of cocoanut-palms.

As I drew near the house, I saw a light in one of the rooms and heard someone talking in low, hurried tones. Curious to learn why any member of the household should be up at such an ungodly hour, I stole to the window of the room and looked in.

It was a small, square, white-washed room with a battered old walnut desk in one corner, a big easy-chair in another, and shelves full of books along both the side-walls. A lamp was burning dimly on a round mahogany center-table.

Fronting me on the opposite wall hung a roughly-made wicker cage containing a small green parrot apparently asleep. Before it knelt a young Indian girl perhaps sixteen or seventeen years old.

She was speaking rapidly under her breath, swaying back and forth and occasionally pausing to touch her forehead to the floor. Although I couldn't understand a word she said, it was plain enough what she was doing. She was praying to the parrot.

I stood there for a minute or two watching her in a sort of angry disgust, half-minded to smash the window and put a stop to such a heathenish performance. Then I went around to the door and knocked sharply on it.

The praying, if such it was, stopped; there was a scurrying of bare feet over straw matting, the soft closing of a door at the end of the house; then silence. I waited a decent interval, and knocked again.

Finally, I succeeded in rousing Wing. He didn't seem surprised to see me, nor particularly glad, either, I thought, though I might have been mistaken on that score, for he was never in the least demonstrative.

I said nothing to him of what I had seen, partly because I was ashamed to admit that I'd been peeping in the window with no better excuse than an idle curiosity, and partly because I had no wish to get the girl into trouble by telling him what she'd been up to.

For all I knew, indeed, he might have surprised her himself before this at her outlandish devotions, and seen no harm in them; in which case it seemed likely enough that he would resent my speaking of the matter as something which was after all no concern of mine.

Nor was it any of my business, I decided, if he chose to pretend that she was merely his cook and housekeeper, though why he should think it necessary to keep up such a pretence I couldn't understand. He might have known that I should be the last person to blame him for doing what nine men out of ten in his place would have done.

And her own attitude so unmistakably revealed how matters stood that it rendered the exaggerated coldness with which he treated her doubly ridiculous.

BUT though I was mistaken, it seemed, about Wing not being the sort to take up with a native woman, I was right in thinking that it couldn't be altogether a tie of that kind which had kept him from going home.

What his chief reason was for staying on I learned soon after my arrival. He had been taking me over the place and showing me what he had done in the way of setting out trees, clearing the land, planting and so-forth.

"It's beastly uninteresting sort of work," he said as he led the way back to the house. "If I hadn't anything better to occupy me, I should have gone out long ago."

"I felt sure you couldn't have stood it here so long if the place hadn't some other attraction for you," I told him, "though I haven't been able to guess what it is."

"You didn't know natural history was a hobby of mine?" he replied. "It's the only thing, except law and psychology, in which I ever took much interest, though I've never had any time to devote to it till I came down here. Since then—well, if it wont bore you to death, I'll show you my collection and you can see for yourself what I've been doing."

I told him, of course, that I should like very much to see it, though as a matter of fact I care no more for that kind of thing than the average man does. And I had a hard time during the next half-hour or so pretending to enthuse over the various preserved specimens of birds, butterflies, snakes, lizards and other loathsome creatures which Wing took such evident pride in showing me.

They were all arranged with the greatest care and nicety in glass cases such as one sees in a museum. And it was plain that he cherished them as the apple of his eye, or he would hardly have kept the entire lot in his bedroom as though they were something thieves would be likely to steal at night.

I had, as I thought, dutifully examined the last object in the collection—a particularly repulsive-looking lizard which Wing assured me was one of the rarest known—and was about to suggest that we go out on the veranda for a smoke, when he remarked that there was still something else, in the library, that he wanted me to see.

"Yes?" I said, with what show of enthusiasm I could summon. "What is it?"

"A parrot," he told me, "a common little green parrot, though I think you'll agree with me that this is rather an extraordinary specimen, in one respect at least."

"Haven't a doubt of it," I replied, half-minded to tell him that I had already seen it, "but as I don't know the first thing about parrots, you mustn't feel badly if I fail to notice that his tail is an inch longer or his topknot a shade redder than the rest of his tribe."

He turned and looked at me rather sharply. I'm afraid he'd already begun to suspect the genuineness of my interest in his hobby, hard as I had tried to prevent his doing so.

"It isn't any peculiarity of that sort that makes him remarkable," he said, frowning. "It's something"—he paused and shrugged his shoulders—"of my own imagining, I guess. Probably you wont notice anything odd about him."

BUT I did. The instant my eyes met the parrot's I knew what Wing meant. There was something queer about them, something in or rather behind them which had no business to be there. It sent a shiver down my spine.

Wing must have noticed the start I gave, for he smiled a trifle grimly and asked me if I had ever before seen a bird with eyes like that.

I shook my head; I was still too dazed to speak.

"Nor has anyone else, either, so far as I know," he said, "and yet the same thing may well have happened before."

"The same thing?" I repeated, puzzled.

"Then you haven't guessed yet what that look in his eyes means? It was clear enough to me the moment I saw it."

And he went on to tell me how he had come into possession of the parrot.

IT seemed that on his last trip to Vera Cruz a few months before, a man who looked like a Portuguese sailor had stopped him one night as he was entering his hotel and begged him for a drink of whisky. As the

fellow already reeked of rum, Wing was amazed at the sober, deadly earnestness with which he spoke, and still more so at his face.

Never, he told me, had he seen such abject fear on any human countenance. It startled him so that without thinking he took out a dollar and gave it to the man, who shoved a bulky object wrapped in sailcloth into his hands and hurried off without another word.

When Wing reached his room he found that the object was a wicker cage containing the parrot. He found out also what had brought that look of horror to the man's face. At any rate he believed so, though his explanation of it seemed utterly absurd.

Wing's theory was that the parrot had a soul—not a soul of its own, you understand, but one that had been left it, so to speak, by some former owner.

According to him there was no good reason why such a thing couldn't have happened, though it could only have been the result, he said, of a partly successful attempt at projecting the astral body.

What he meant as nearly as I could make out was that someone had swapped souls with the parrot, and that something or other had happened to prevent the man's getting his soul back. Sounds silly enough, I know; but Wing believed it.

He even went so far as to say that there was nothing miraculous about it, nothing—to use his own words—that any intelligent, broad-minded person should find in the least incredible.

I should have set him down as stark crazy after that, of course, but for one thing.

On no rational grounds could I myself account for the extraordinary effect which the parrot's eyes had produced on me. I'm not an impressionable man. I take no stock in occult things. I have no psychic sense, as it is termed. Why, then, during the entire time we were in the library should I have been distinctly conscious of the feeling that there was a third person in the room with us?

It was exactly the same sensation that warns one on waking up at night of a silent, invisible presence by the bedside. And a devilishly uncomfortable sensation it is, as some of you doubtless know.

I was glad enough, I can tell you, when the girl, Teresa, knocked on the door and said that Wing's native foreman wanted to speak to him. That gave me a chance to go for a walk and try to get rid of a lot of superstitious fancies that had begun to bother me.

But though I kept telling myself I was a fool to think that there might be any truth in Wing's theory about the parrot, I couldn't forget the sudden chill which had come over me at that uncanny look in the bird's eyes. And it was only after a brisk tramp of a couple of miles that I succeeded in convincing myself that I must have been the victim of a delusion, due to my sleepless night and tired nerves.

It was already beginning to get dark when on my way back I came to the edge of the clearing that surrounded the house and caught sight of two people in the path ahead of me.

One of them was Teresa and the other was a short, stocky man with a big straw sombrero and red serape whom I didn't remember having seen about the place before.

They were talking together very earnestly, and, not caring to interrupt them, I hung back waiting for him to leave. But though he seemed impatient enough to be off, each time

he made a move to go the girl clung to his arm and prevented him.

At length I got tired waiting and started toward them, only to stop short as soon as I got within hearing distance.

"Why don't you kill him, then?" the man was asking her. "I'd cut his throat in a minute if I had the chance."

I couldn't hear what she said in reply.

"Well, I'm not going to stay here all night arguing with you," he retorted angrily; and, shoving her roughly aside, he hurried off.

She ran a short way after him, calling to him to come back; but she couldn't overtake him. Presently she gave up and went on toward the house, sobbing.

WING listened gravely enough when I told him about it, though he took it more calmly than I expected.

"I don't believe anyone would dare to kill him," he said when I had finished.

"Kill him?" I repeated. "Whom do you mean?"

"Why, the parrot, of course," he replied impatiently. "Whom did you think I meant?"

"I thought it was *you* they were talking about," I explained.

"So that's why you came back looking as though you'd seen a ghost?" he said, smiling. "You thought you'd discovered a plot to murder me, eh?" Well, it was a natural enough mistake for you to make, I suppose," he went on reflectively. "I forgot to tell you that all the natives hereabouts are scared to death of the parrot. They think the devil's in him."

"I don't wonder they do," I said shortly, my face still hot at the ridiculous blunder I had made. "It wouldn't surprise me any, either." I added, "if they think you're in league with Old Nick yourself. If I were you, I'd wring that bird's neck, right away."

Wing looked positively horrified.

"Wring his neck?" he repeated slowly. "Why, my dear fellow, I should as soon think of wringing yours. I wouldn't have anything happen to him for a fortune. It would put an end to an experiment which if it succeeds, as I feel sure it must, will startle the whole psychological world and upset all the accepted theories of Wundt and his school regarding the fluidity of psychic atoms and the essential unchangeability of the ego."

I told him bluntly that I hadn't the slightest idea what he was talking about, but that I was still of the opinion that the best thing he could do with the parrot was to kill it before it caused any serious mischief.

He lost his temper at that and asked me hotly if I expected him to let the fool notions of a lot of ignorant savages interfere with his actions.

I started to tell him that he couldn't very well afford to make enemies of them for the sake of trying to demonstrate some crazy theory of his own about the parrot.

But, realizing that he was in no mood to be reasoned with, I shrugged my shoulders and said that of course it was none of my business what he chose to do.

WING started off early the next morning on one of his grubbing expeditions, as he called them.

He invited me to go with him; but the prospect of a long day in the broiling sun fighting flies and mosquitoes didn't appeal to me so much as a book and a hammock-couch on the screened veranda. And it was there I spent the morning and most of the afternoon.

Along toward five o'clock I got

tired lying there reading and, though a thunder-storm was threatening, I decided to take the other canoe and paddle upstream to meet him.

I hadn't gone more than a mile, however, when the storm burst and sent me hurrying back. I was drenched to the skin when I reached the house, and by the time I'd changed my things it was long after the usual dinner-hour.

As Wing hadn't come back yet, I went out on the veranda to wait for him.

The thunder-storm had passed, but it was still raining hard, and in the gathering dusk everything looked blurred and ghost-like. The river itself was hidden under a thick blanket of mist, above which on the farther bank the spectral heads of giant-palms stood vaguely outlined against the sky.

Once or twice I thought I heard the sound of a canoe approaching, but the beating of the rain on the tin roof made so much noise that I couldn't be sure of it.

Presently, however, I became aware of another sound—the sound of someone sobbing. It was Teresa. I looked around to find her standing in the doorway, her short, rather dumpy figure in a cheap, ill-fitting dress of blue-checked "manta" pitilessly revealed in the light of the dining-room lamp.

For the twentieth time I wondered what had attracted Wing to her. Not her beauty, certainly; for she had none except her eyes, which were of a soft, melting shade of brown with extraordinarily long lashes.

"Well, Teresa," I said, after waiting a moment for her to speak, "what's the trouble?"

"The patron!" she gasped, making an effort to steady her voice. "He hasn't come back yet, and he was never so late as this before. Something has happened to him. I know it; I feel it—here." And she put her hand quickly to her breast.

"Nonsense!" I said sharply. "Nothing at all has happened to him. He's been delayed by some accident to the canoe probably, or else he's waited for the rain to let up before starting back."

But she shook her head.

"Something *has* happened to him," she repeated obstinately. "I'm going to find out what it is." And she turned and left me.

A moment later I heard her running down the path to the landing and started to call to her to come back. But it was none of my business after all, I reflected, if she chose to go gallivanting off in the dark to find Wing.

Her anxiety for his safety seemed so childish to me that it wasn't until I had finished my solitary meal and smoked a couple of cigars that I began to wonder if there could be any reasonable grounds for it. I could conceive of none; and yet as the minutes passed and he didn't return I began to grow uneasy and went out again on the veranda to listen for a sound of his coming.

But though the rain had stopped and not a breath of air was stirring, I could hear nothing but the swish and gurgle of the current racing stealthily past in the darkness. There was something in the sound of it that got on my nerves after a while and sent me indoors again.

I had just resumed my seat at the dining-room table and taken up my book when I was startled by a sudden outburst of speech from the library. It was the parrot, whose presence there I had quite forgotten.

He went on jabbering to himself in some foreign tongue that sounded like Portuguese or Italian, with an occasional word of English thrown in, until I snatched the cloth from

the table and threw it over his cage. That silenced him.

I shut the library door and picked up my book once more. But I couldn't keep my mind on it. Presently I got up and went to the outside door, where I stood for some time peering into the hot, murky darkness, my ears strained to catch the slightest sound. And at length I did hear something—a slow, dragging shuffle of bare feet on the hard dirt path that led up from the river.

"Is that you, Teresa?" I called, but no one answered me.

The sound of footsteps had ceased. I hurried down the path and found the girl in a crumpled heap on the ground. It was not until I'd carried her into the house and made her swallow a big tablespoonful of brandy that she was able to answer my questions.

THE current, it seemed, had been too much for her, and after struggling against it till her strength gave out, she had fallen half-unconscious in the bottom of the canoe and drifted most of the way back. She had clung all along to the hope that Wing might have passed her in the dark without her knowing it; and with that hope gone, what little energy and spirit she had left seemed to go also.

Her big, dark eyes kept seeking mine with a look of piteous appeal in them which I couldn't fail to understand—she was begging me to go in search of Wing.

I had already made up my mind to do so, for I could no longer stifle the fear that he had met with some serious mishap; and, leaving her huddled motionless against the wall, I went to my room to get my flashlight and revolver.

When I came back a few minutes later Teresa was still sitting just as I had left her, her face buried in her arms, a picture of misery and despair which would, I'm sure, have touched a much harder heart than mine.

"Cheer up, Teresa," I started to say, when I heard Wing's voice calling me.

At the sound of it the girl uttered a shriek and slid senseless to the floor. I stood there, with the perspiration cold on my body, staring wildly over my shoulder at the closed door of the empty library.

"Varley!" Wing cried again—and it was unmistakably his voice, though it had an odd, throaty quaver in it. "Are you there, Varley?"

Somehow or other I managed to cross the room and open the library door; but when I tried to speak, to answer him, my tongue seemed paralyzed. I could only stand there, my eyes fixed in a kind of dreadful fascination on the spot from which the voice had come—*the parrot's darkened cage.*

"If you are there, Varley," the voice continued—it had grown so weak now I could scarcely hear it—"I've something . . . very . . . important . . . to . . . tell you. I . . . want . . . you . . . to see . . . that——"

There it broke off.

A ghastly silence followed, which lasted hours, it seemed to me, before I could screw up my courage to approach the cage and lift the cloth that covered it. When at last I did so, I found the parrot dead in the bottom of it, the blood still trickling from a gash in its side.

Silk on a Thorn

By H. M. HAMILTON

IT was mid-afternoon in winter. A case was being argued in the District Court of Fai Nun. Voices wrangled interminably. The *Chi Hsien*, or Magistrate, sat like a fat bronze Buddha with closed eyes. He seemed to be listening .

He was not listening. He was thinking of his wife, Ti So. She was the pride of his old heart. He never told her so.

Cho Li, that was his name, knew how to treat women. He kept Ti So secluded. One must do that, because a woman was like a bird. She would fly if she could.

"Your Excellency will understand," said one of the pleaders. Cho Li nodded.

He was composing a poem in the Japanese style, or *hokku*, which must have seventeen syllables or it is not a poem. It must also suggest more than it says. He achieved this after many trials:

> "A bird flies free;
> Woman needs a cage,
> How docile—
> But watch the cage-door!"

That was a true poem. Cho Li counted the syllables by moving his fingers with the long nail-guards. Then he opened his eyes.

"You, Long Sing," he proclaimed, "shall pay to Wei Chan the sum of twelve thousand taels. I have decided. It is finished. Go!"

Wei Chan had paid two thousand taels to His Excellency as a bribe. Long Sing had offered only a thousand for a favorable decision. Cho Li felt that justice had been done. He summoned an attendant.

"What sort of a day is it?"

"A fur-coat day, Excellency."

"Very well. I shall wear five coats. Have a rickshaw ready."

CHO LI was a mandarin of the fourth rank, entitled to an opaque blue button on the top of his rimless hat, which bellied outward at the summit.

Carefully he donned his five coats of padded blue silk with the help of his servant.

Blue was his color.

The innermost coat was darkest: it was called "Sky at Midnight." The outer coat was of very pale blue. "Water at Dawn" was its name. The others were of intermediate shades, all appropriately named, and embroidered with patient skill.

Cho Li loved blue.

A gust of cold air met him as he went out and clambered into his rickshaw. Pale winter sunset-light colored the west. The two-wheeled vehicle clattered over cobblestones. The runner in the shafts and the two men who preceded him, carrying sticks with which to flail pedestrians out of the path, all cried raucously in unison:

"Hai! Hai! Make way for His Excellency!"

They wore blue cotton drawers and sandals of straw. Their bodies were like bronze. Snow was in the air, yet drops of perspiration started out on their backs, and clung there, ready to freeze.

Cho Li was not aware of their existence. His eyes were on the sun, visible in a haze above the low roofs. It was a sun without glare, colored like an orange, or a plum, or a ripe, red poppy.

Cho Li scented another subject for a poem.

"Sunset — poppy — rest ——" he meditated. Then he made his poem:

"The poppy-sun falls earthward;
Tired men rejoice and say:
O blest drug, sleep!"

Meanwhile the runners trotted like machines. The city was left behind. The road was covered with snow, the ruts frozen like iron. Gray mists unfolded. Some storks flew up from a frozen pond.

Cho Li made another poem:

"Three storks; a sky of gray:
Ice on the lake;
But O!
The trees dream of spring!"

"Hai! Hai! Make way for His Grandeur!" came voices that drew nearer, mingling with the voices of Cho Li's runners like an echo.

"What Grandeur?" mused Cho Li.

He was displeased; but the other rickshaw drew near.

In it sat a man with a mask-like face. He wore a flowered red button on his hat, which indicated that he was two ranks higher than Cho Li. He was, in fact, Kee Lun, Magistrate of the *Fu*, or higher court.

The runners stood panting, shivering. Both mandarins clasped their own hands and inclined their heads. Kee Lun, as the superior, spoke first:

"The path of discomfort becomes the way of pleasure on meeting you, Cho Li."

Cho Li bowed.

What, he wondered, was Kee Lun's business in this lonely road, bordered by high walls of the homes of the elect? Nevertheless one was obliged to answer.

"My unworthy heart is gladdened by Your Grandeur's condescension," he said, bowing.

"Such praise uplifts my unworthiness to pride, Cho Li," was the answer.

Kee Lun's gray-masked face annoyed Cho Li, as did everything else about him: even to the green-silk coats which kept his body from the cold.

A sudden suspicion came into Cho Li's heart.

He said:

"Grandeur, you honor the poor road which passes my humble door."

Kee Lun seemed surprised.

"Have I passed your palace unaware?" he countered.

Cho Li studied the impassive face. Then he asked:

"Did Your Grandeur not see a low door in a wall with spiked hat?"

"Careless and unobservant that I am! I noticed nothing."

Cho Li was not satisfied. His sharp slant eyes had caught sight of a little tear at the bottom of Kee Lun's green outer coat.

"Will Your Grandeur deign to return with me?" he pleaded. "It is a poor place, my house, but I would fain show Your Grandeur the spikes I have put on my wall—put there to guard against thieves. None can compass that wall, at least not without tearing his garment."

He looked fixedly at the bottom of Kee Lun's coat.

"Unfortunately I cannot," said Kee Lun coldly. "I have certain contemptible business to which to attend. Another time, perhaps."

He gave a signal; both men saluted gravely, then the runners, who had been clapping their hands to keep warm, and seemed chilled by reason of having to stand, half-naked, in the chilly wind, started off on their journey.

They still shouted "Hai! Hai!"

though the way was quite deserted. They had been told to shout; they had not been told to reason about their shouting.

A LITTLE later Cho Li descended from the rickshaw in front of the blue gate. He glanced at the spikes on the top of the wall. But it was already dark.

He walked ponderously through his garden, whose dwarf trees were bare. Snow was on the path which crossed an icy pool by a small curved bridge.

A servant opened the door of his house. He went in.

The main room was dimly lit. It had polished floors. There were no ornaments except a single picture, of cherry-blossoms, at the far end of the room, and a bronze Buddha at one side. The walls were of a soft blue.

The servant took Cho Li's robes and brought him slippers, also a rug and a charcoal brazier. Cho Li sat down, rubbing his hands. Then he clapped, twice.

A tiny woman entered noiselessly. Her feet were as small as a baby's. She wore a robe of blue satin. Her hair was carefully arranged, and her lips were rouged. Her cheeks were like rose-petals. It was Ti So, Cho Li's wife. She knelt before him. Her eyes were bright as a bird's.

"Excellency!" she said softly. "You desire——?"

Cho Li smiled, even though his heart was troubled.

She was beautiful, and he lived for beauty.

So, quite gently, he began:

"I desire to ask my Little Flower what has happened today."

She lifted her bright eyes, then lowered them.

"Nothing, Excellency. My life begins when you return."

"Hm! You were alone, then, all day?"

"Except for my maid, Excellency. Why should I not be alone?"

"I just wondered. Did you go out?"

"No, Excellency. It is cold outside. I have not stirred."

Cho Li shook his head doubtfully.

"Go, Ti So," he said. "And tell your maid to ask Fong to come here."

She went out silently.

A little later Fong, Cho Li's Secretary, came in. He was a quiet, studious youth. He paid reverence.

"Fong," said Cho Li, "do you know a Mandarin official named Kee Lun?"

Fong signified that he did not. Cho Li frowned.

"You have been here all day? Did you hear runners shouting 'Hai! Hai!' before I came?"

Fong considered.

"I heard Your Excellency's runners. No others."

"Aha!" said Cho Li. "So they passed in silence—or they did not pass at all! Why should they be silent, if not for an evil reason?"

"I understand too little, Excellency," said Fong. "What evil reason could there be?"

"This," replied Cho Li. "I met Kee Lun, who is a Grandeur, on the road a mile from here. He wore a green robe, and it was torn. What do you say, Fong? Could it be torn by a spike of my high wall?"

"Anything is possible. But why should a Grandeur climb the wall?"

Cho Li was silent for a space.

"I have a jewel here," he said at last.

"The jewel is guarded," replied Fong. "Yet, I was busy writing all afternoon."

"You heard no voices?"

Fong considered.

"Once—a man's. I thought it was old Kin Chow, the gardener's."

Cho Li's eyes were narrower than before.

"Why do I keep you, Fong?"

"Excellency, I follow my orders. Always, I serve."

"Serve now. See if there are marks of a Mandarin's silk boots in the snow under the spiked wall. Take a lantern."

Fong bowed. Presently he returned.

"The eye of diligence has seen. There were such marks, where that tall tree overhangs the wall, at the summer-house side."

"Take me to see them."

"Forgive, Excellency. The marks are gone. With my foot I rubbed them away. What? Shall the house of His Excellency keep a sign of shame?"

Cho Li reflected.

"His outer coat was torn. It was bright green. Perhaps he has left a shred of it on a spike."

"It is difficult, Excellency," said Fong. "But I shall search."

THIS time he was gone for a long period.

Cho Li went to the window. He saw a shadowy figure with a lantern walking along the top of the wall. Then the figure leaped down and began to search among the bushes. At last it came toward the house.

"Well, Fong?"

Fong bowed low.

"On a thorn I found this, Excellency."

It was a bit of green silk no greater than an inch at its widest. Fong had brought along a thorny stem from a rosebush. The silk was shredded where the thorn impaled it. Cho Li sighed and sat down.

"She is very beautiful, Fong. It is a pity. I love beautiful things about me. The house will be strangely desolate, Fong. But——"

Fong did not speak. But after long silence he murmured:

"A woman is only a woman, Excellency, always weak."

Cho Li was not listening.

"A cord around the neck leaves very little mark, Fong. Tonight, as she sleeps——"

Fong lifted his thoughtful, studious face.

"Forgiveness, Excellency. But may I utter a thought?"

"Speak."

"When a wolf comes into a sheepfold, which does the owner kill—the wolf or the lamb?"

"The wolf. Well spoken, Fong."

Fong fingered with something under his girdle.

"A woman is a possession, Excellency. What man would break a lovely vase, though a thief desired to steal it? The thing stolen is not the stealer. Besides, Excellency, who knows whether she did not mock him?"

"Ah! But she said no one was here!"

"I do not see into the hearts of woman, Excellency. But if I were a woman, and a man had come to steal me, and failed, I think that I might say that very thing. For a lie which brings peace is better than a truth that leads to battle."

"Then you would think only of this green-robed thief of happiness?"

"I should not merely think, Excellency. There is need of a deed."

"A deed—ah, yes! But I shrink from deeds, Fong. A knot tied about that little white neck—I could attend to that. But a Grandeur—that is somewhat different."

"Excellency, forgive my blunt speech. But this green-robed Grandeur may not keep silent. One may speak of you: he will say, 'I know

his garden. There are spikes on the wall.' Then those who hear will smile, and there will be mockery in those smiles. Excellency is a poet. He does not know, perhaps, the necessity for saving one's countenance."

"Enough!" cried Cho Li. "I shall kill him! I shall cut out his heart."

"Shall I write a letter to His Grandeur, asking him to visit you tomorrow?"

Fong's voice trembled with eagerness. But Cho Li sat pensive.

"What, tomorrow? After our talk together today? He is sure to suspect."

"Then Your Excellency will risk his climbing the wall a second time? Green-coat will be no laggard, I warrant."

Cho Li sat pensive.

He looked very much like Buddha as he sat there, cross-legged, with fat cheeks and his little slant eyes almost closed.

"Silence, Fong. A thought comes to me. He must die; but not yet."

"'Not yet'! They are forgetful words, Excellency."

"A wise man does not forget, Fong. I am a slow man, a methodical man. Moreover, I have a sense of fitness."

"Excellency means——?"

"I mean that because I am older than you, Fong, I am also wiser. I see all faces of a subject: you see but one. First, is it not evident that if I were to kill him tomorrow it would be said: 'Cho Li is a revengeful man. He must be beheaded.' I do not wish to be beheaded, Fong.

"Moreover, he would not come tomorrow, even if I asked him. No; I have resolved that he shall die. But I shall not be blamed for killing him. The sure way is the perfect way, Fong. Let me reflect."

FONG sat perfectly still. Presently Cho Li began again:

"I have the soul of an artist, Fong. Art demands fitness. What is earth's color now?"

"White with snow, Excellency—gray with sullen clouds," replied Fong, puzzled.

"Ah, yes! And white is the color of mourning; gray the color of despair. But in the face of Kee Lun as I saw him today was only insolent triumph. A thousand curses upon him! He was laughing at me, beyond doubt, sitting there in his green robes! There is a fitness in all things, Fong. Green is his color, as blue is mine. When I go to my fathers, I ask to go under a sky as blue as this jacket I wear. And when he—this thief—goes, it is fitting that he have a green death; is it not so, Fong?"

Fong studied.

"There could be pine boughs in the room; a long green drink for His Grandeur in his green robe; green-shaded lanterns. Is it not almost perfect, Excellency?"

"There is no such thing as almost perfect, Fong. Perfection is, or is not. I have a plan. Tomorrow we go—Ti So and I—to my home far back in the hill-country. We shall remain there till the first days of Spring, when the grass grows green, and the rice-shoots and the bamboo-sprouts spring up.

"By that time His Grandeur will have forgotten that perhaps I have cause to be angry. Green is the color of jealous anger, Fong. That which is fitting, I would do. Listen!"

And he spoke rapidly, softly. Fong listened.

"It is well, Excellency. Wisdom speaks louder than my folly. What you have ordered, I shall do."

"Go now, Fong. But first strike that gong of bronze."

The billowing echoes had not yet

died away, before Ti So entered. She seemed pale, but her eyes were as bright as a swallow's.

"Tomorrow, Ti So, we go to the mountains. We return when the first green of springtime comes. That is all. Go."

"Yes, Excellency," said Ti So.

But she shivered.

Cho Li noticed neither her going nor her agitation. He had resolved. It was settled. His peace of mind had come back. He was happy. He thought of a poem. He repeated it with unction:

"Deep in green slime
A robe like lily-leaf.
What! Has love so silent grown?"

Then he laughed without making a sound.

THE sky was very blue, and the trees were sending out their first shoots of green. Cho Li wore a long garment of pale blue.

"All is ready, Fong? You have cunningly sawed the boards of the curved bridge over the lily-pond, as I told you? Remember, His Grandeur is not heavy, as I am. You are sure they will break?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"It is well. Ti So is in her rooms. I have seen to that. Ah! I hear the wheels now. His Grandeur comes."

Cho Li waited, looking down into the pool. The lily-leaves had just unfolded. The garden was a rapture of green. But the lily-pool was Cho Li's masterpiece.

Under the bridge it had been hollowed out so that it was deep, like a well. The stones were covered with green moss.

Cho Li heard a slow step. He turned, smiling and bowing.

"Welcome to Your Grandeur!"

Kee Lun came across the green grass. His hands were hidden in the folds of his robe of grass-green silk. He bowed gravely.

"It is a beautiful garden you have, Excellency. I love it thus, when it is fresh and green. Green is my favorite color, Excellency."

"I observe, Grandeur. Deign to look at my lily-pool. If Your Grandeur will walk to the center of my little bridge, and look down—— The waters are very, very green."

"From here," said Kee Lun, "they reflect the sky, and are as blue as the robe you wear, Cho Li."

"It depends upon where one stands. If Your Grandeur will cross this bridge, pausing in the middle——"

Fong had stood with eyes downcast. He looked up once. An eye bright as a bird's appeared at the lattice of a window. Fong picked up a green stick which lay on the ground. Cho Li had provided it. There might be a need.

"I await Your Grandeur's opinion of my lily-pool of green," said Cho Li, a trifle impatiently. "Be pleased to step out on this bridge."

Kee Lun's face was stern.

"I follow, Cho Li. Lead the way."

"The jackal does not precede the lion," said Cho Li.

"My merit is far below Your Excellency's," said Kee Lun, with a smile. "For once let Virtue show the way to Insignificance. Go first, Cho Li."

Cho Li's face had the pallor of a yellow skin, that is to say, it grew livid. But he smiled.

"Forgive me, Grandeur. I must follow."

Kee Lun's lips were tight and grim.

"Poor though my merit may be, Cho Li," he said slowly, "it happens that in this unjust world the unworthy sometimes rule the worthy. I happen to be Prefect of this District, Cho Li. I have some small unmerited

authority. When I say 'Go first' I mean 'Go first,' Cho Li."

Cho Li looked imploringly at Fong, whose eyes were downcast.

"Fong," he said, "solve this for us old friends who quarrel over a nothing. Go first yourself, my servant."

"Grandeur?" asked Fong, looking up sidewise.

"I have said that Cho Li is to go first," said Kee Lun. "I am accustomed to obedience."

His eyes met Cho Li's like swords. Cho Li looked up at the sky, bluer than his robe. He knew it to be a last look.

"I obey, Grandeur," he said.

With dignity he walked out across the curved bridge. Just as he reached the middle there was a splintering sound. The bridge parted, and let Cho Li down into the green, slimy water. His hands, wide-open, clutched at air. Then he was gone.

Bubbles went down and came up. But Cho Li did not come up.

Kee Lun gathered his green robe around him and looked down past the lily-leaves. There was the green of moss on the rocks.

Kee Lun sighed.

"Why he should desire my death I know not, Fong. But that does not lessen my gratitude to you for your warning. Come tomorrow for your reward. I may be of use to you hereafter. Tell me, though, is—was His Excellency married? Has he a wife to mourn him?"

"No, Grandeur," said Fong, bowing. "There is none to mourn him."

IT was evening. Ti So came out of her room just as Fong entered the great hall. He held out his arms, but she knelt before him until he lifted her, smiling. Her eyes were shining, her voice reverential.

"Master!" she whispered. "Are we really free, then? Waiting was long. I have lived through an eternity since our last day together—that day, you remember, when you begged me for a scrap of green silk to put on a thorn. Then *he* took me away."

Fong's lips became a thin, straight line.

"He will not come back," he said thoughtfully. "Tell me, am I to be your slave, or your master, Little Flower?"

"My master."

She bowed low before him, seeking favor. His stern lips relaxed.

"A woman's virtue is obedience," he said sententiously. "'Be without knowledge and free from desires'—so says the Wise One. It is good for women to remember. Bring me a fan."

Ti So obeyed. The wings of her soul fluttered, but her cage-door was still shut. One Master gone—another took his place. So it was with women.

OUTSIDE, in the garden-pool under the moon, the fringe of a blue robe floated like a lily-leaf. Blue . . . but in that green water, and in that pallid light, it was the greenest thing in the green garden!

The Edge of the Ax

By HUNTER STINSON

E. E. TIBBS, who went up and down the Ozark woodlands about the business of the Ridge Tie & Lumber Company, leaned patiently against the counter and waited the convenience of Serena Mansfield.

He watched her where she stood precariously upon a ladder in the high gloom of her general store, checking and stowing away upon the upper shelves a consignment of canned goods that had come upon the same train by which he had traveled. He had waited five minutes and he would willingly wait as many more since he had need of Serena Mansfield.

Moreover, in the remote Ozarks time is not money. Time is only time.

When he had come through the wide screen door, Miss Serena had called an encouraging, "Be there in just a minute," and now, as another arrival banged the door, she promised the same thing. Nevertheless, she remained perched aloft and Mr. Tibbs employed the time in observing the latest entrant.

He was tall and angular, clad, like most Ozark males, in loose, worn overalls and hickory shirt, from the collar of which his neck rose in leathern stringiness to a protuberant Adam's apple and a jutting, bony chin. High cheek bones flanked a thin and high-ridged nose that seemed like a rudder between small ears standing almost at right angles to the skull like sails. His lips were compressed to a line at once obstinate and sober.

When, finally, Miss Serena backed down the ladder and turned to him, Mr. Tibbs bowed from the hips, for he had been born in Mississippi and had preserved intact the manners of his origin.

"Cash customers first, ma'am," he protested pleasantly, indicating the other, and walked to the door to survey the main and only business street of Tranquil Summit.

Behind him, Miss Serena filled, bit by bit, the market basket upon the counter, transacting the affair to a running fire of comment upon local matters to which the countryman made little reply and Mr. Tibbs paid little attention. He was mulling over a problem and he was roused from its consideration only by the peculiar acerbity of a remark that came from the customer.

"Needn't give me those things," he said sharply, throwing back upon the counter a half dozen packages of cheap cigarettes that Miss Serena had placed upon the top of his basket. "If there are others that make graven images of their desires and pander to their appetites for godless things, I'm not one."

Miss Serena flushed and without a word took the money offered her. In silence she handed back some change, and silently she watched the depar-

ture of what Mr. Tibbs considered a most unpleasant patron.

"Did you ever?" she asked, turning to him. "And when a body was thinking to be of service without being asked."

"The gentleman," commented Mr. Tibbs with a smile, "evidently doesn't believe in exposing himself to tobacco heart."

"Or hurting himself being nice to people," added Miss Serena, recovering good temper without an effort. "Now what can I do for you, sir?"

"I'm E. E. Tibbs," he explained, "the new general manager of the Ridge company, ma'am. I was told I could rent an automobile from you, Miss Mansfield."

"Good land," she interjected, "and the very man you wanted to see was here just this second, Mr. Tibbs. Wait! I'll see if I can call him back."

She ran to the door, but returned disappointed.

"Isn't that a pity! He's out of sight," she told him. "I could let you have an auto, but it wouldn't be the least mite of use where you want to go. There's rocks right in the centre of the road would tear a differential to pieces in a minute. You'd better take my black mare and the runabout."

"That," said Mr. Tibbs, "is certainly most kind of you." He hesitated and then resumed: "But how do you know where I want to go, ma'am?"

"Why else," she replied, rolling the sleeves of her print dress down over rounded forearms, "would the Ridge company be sending its general manager here if it weren't to see the heir to the Gordon trees? Heaven knows, the company's been after them long enough. And to think of Alfred Gordon being right here under your nose and you not knowing it!"

Mr. Tibbs' eyes widened in proper admiration and he murmured, "I had been told you were a most observant woman, ma'am, and now I can believe it. You have hit the nail square upon the head."

"I'm an ordinary human being," said Miss Serena, disclaiming this praise, "with an abiding interest in the goings and the comings of all God's creatures. It's just my pleasure once in a while to put two and two together and see how much they make."

SHE busied herself taking bills from the cashdrawer and locking them into the safe, leaving only a few dollars in silver in the shallow wooden treasury under the counter. That finished, she stepped to the rear of the store, took a blue cloak and a wide-woven straw bonnet from a peg and called through the back door:

"Julius! Hitch the mare to the runabout and bring her around front. And don't you dast to leave the store whilst I'm gone."

Mr. Tibbs viewed this unusual storekeeper with complete approbation as she walked up the wide aisle toward him. Miss Serena was still on the correct side of fifty. She had been sequestered by these hills from the alarums of the outside world as well as from the devastating touch of its beauty parlors and thus her face was unlined, unworried and gently pink; while, Mr. Tibbs observed, the black and white figures of her starched dress were most becoming to her large and well-knit person. Now, approaching him, she donned the cloak and pushed the hat about upon her head until it sat comfortably.

"It's better that I should go with you, Mr. Tibbs," she said, accounting for her preparations. "The mare is skittish with an unfamiliar hand on the reins. Besides, I have a shameful longing to know if two people who look so much alike when they are away from each other look the same when they are together."

While they waited under the old-fashioned wooden awning that hovered above the sidewalk, she interpreted this.

"The man you just saw was Alfred Gordon," she told him. "He has a twin brother, Angus, and they are as like to each other as two peas from the same pod. Until now, only Angus has come to the store and the last thing he always buys is cigarettes—appears like that's the last thing Alfred will ever buy.

"It's ghostly, that's what it is, Mr. Tibbs, to have one of them come into the store and not know whether it's him or his brother there. So I'm going to see them together and learn to tell them apart."

Presently a sunburned youth came to them, holding the nervous head of a small black mare, hitched between the shafts of a red-wheeled buggy. Into this Miss Serena climbed nimbly, followed by Mr. Tibbs, and the mare, quieting at a word from her, drew them off swiftly upon their excursion.

Their way led them past a battery of small business establishments that ministered to the simple necessities of life and took them from that down a quiet street, shady with oaks and faced with neat, white houses.

Those two streets composed the whole of Tranquil Summit, but the visitor was not unimpressed, for he knew that each such little town was the centre of human activities that might spread for miles around.

He had been told, also, that Miss Serena Mansfield was responsible for a large share of Tranquil Summit's affluence, and he expressed his gratitude for her help on what might or might not be a difficult mission.

"Oh," she replied frankly, "I haven't any mind to help you get the trees, Mr. Tibbs. Why, I've always loved the Gordon trees as much as old Alfred Gordon ever did, and I hope some day his wish that the state buy the land as a state park will come true."

"At least, ma'am," asked Mr. Tibbs, "you'll help by telling me something of the new owner, wont you?"

The town had been left behind and Miss Serena carefully guided the mare through a rock-strewn ford before she answered.

"I'll do that," she conceded, "the mite that I know. This Alfred Gordon is a nephew of the old Alfred. He came with his brother to the funeral three weeks ago from his home in Kentucky and to him went the three thousand acres of trees and the home and all else, except a thousand dollar bequest to Angus. He had always been his uncle's favorite, the other being, so the old man told me, fond of light things."

They had turned from the highway, which had been of gravel in poor condition, to take a track that could be called a road by courtesy alone. Its foundation was of dirt, but great boulders reared themselves between the ruts, with here and there the ugly head of a stump, over all of which the buggy climbed and pitched until Mr. Tibbs was forced to hold fast lest he be catapulted out.

No automobile could possibly have made that journey. Then the lane followed the backbone of a ridge and the going became smoother.

Miss Serena relaxed and Mr. Tibbs instantly took advantage of her renewed attention upon him and his concerns.

"Tell me, ma'am," he begged, "if this new owner has the wish to sell, can he do it? Were there any strings put upon him by the will?"

"The way of a woman in love and of a man making a will, Mr. Tibbs, are equally strange and incomprehensible. Though everyone had reckoned he would tie the heir up so, he didn't do it. He laid down no conditions,

except to say he hoped the tract would not be cut.

"The words of the will were that the man who loosed destruction upon his trees would nourish within himself the seeds of his own destruction."

"And what of the nature of the new owner?" asked Mr. Tibbs eagerly. "Is he one to be frightened by an absurd request away from his own best interests? The land is good for nothing else—must it lie useless and our mill on the Big Piney be moved next spring for lack of timber?"

"That," responded Miss Serena, "is something only Alfred Gordon can tell you."

HIGHER and higher the road took them, dipping down a valley only to rise more sheerly on the other side, like a rough and recurring toboggan slide. Oaks met in an arch over their heads. Above and beyond the soft fringe of topmost branches the sky was a deep summer blue and a soft wind ruffled the silky hair of the mare's mane.

The very center of all this beauty, Mr. Tibbs disregarded it and estimated aloud the feet of timber upon the tract, a very seemly occupation for a lumberman, but irritating in the extreme to Miss Serena.

The scar of cut lands already defaced hillside and valley from the Jason County line to the bright, noisy flow of the Big Piney. Each year the slashings had spread like a cancer, and she resented the forces that threw loveliness in at one end of the mill to be belched forth at the other as ugly utility. The coming of the Ridge company to the Gordon trees would mean an increase in her own business, but she hoped that the young Alfred Gordon would prove as adamant as his uncle had been.

The land they were now traversing formed a huge tabletop, nearly flat, and Miss Serena explained that they were within the bounds of the Gordon property. Mr. Tibbs's eyes gloated upon the timber, stretching away as far as he could see, unblemished by fire and cleared of windfalls.

"There is the house," said Miss Serena at length and pointed to a cleared space ahead.

Shaded by too many trees, the house stood, gloomy, pompous, severe. It was of red brick, square and solid looking, speaking impassively of the sober Scotch covenanter who had placed it, imposingly, at the top of the world and far from any neighbor.

Mr. Tibbs shivered when he looked at it and he shivered when he spoke.

"It is a house to press on a body. And never a bit of sunshine through those trees. Could Gordon never get enough of them?"

Thus came the general manager of the Ridge Tie and Lumber Company in the hope of the Gordon acres. Thus he came and within the hour had found his persuasions vain and all the resources of the Ridge company's treasury so much dust.

"This," said Mr. Tibbs finally, "is our best offer, Mr. Gordon, and our last. Think it over carefully—twenty-five dollars an acre for the stumpage rights alone—$75,000 cash, man, and the title to remain with you.

"Can you turn your back on that because of the idle dream of a dead man?"

Miss Serena saw Alfred Gordon's lips straighten with dislike, and she knew that not for ten times that sum would he ever let the trees go to this man. She had known it from the first, for that matter, but she had sat quietly on the veranda, withdrawn from the discussion, in the expectation that before the time came to leave Angus Gordon would appear.

More than anything else at this moment she wanted to see the two

brothers together. But her wish had not been gratified.

"I'd thank you," Alfred Gordon told Mr. Tibbs stiffly, "not to speak of my uncle so. Once and for all I shan't let the trees be cut. The will said that the man who let destruction loose upon them would nourish the seeds of destruction within his own breast, and I'm none to go against a dead man's wishes. I bid you good-day."

"You have just two weeks," said Mr. Tibbs, standing up the better to play his final and highest card and emphasizing each word with a downthrust of his forefinger. "You have just two weeks to change your mind. At the end of that time our mill on the Big Piney will be dismantled and your trees will not be worth that," and he snapped his fingers.

"I shan't sell," repeated Alfred Gordon in a monotone, as though it were the ritual of some stiffnecked creed.

VANQUISHED, Mr. Tibbs followed Miss Serena to the buggy. The angular and obstinate figure upon the gloomy veranda watched their departure immovably and, as Miss Serena turned for a last glance, it vanished within. The black mare picked her way daintily over the uneven surface of the lane, and Miss Serena delivered her first comment upon the interview.

"Well," said she, "I knew from the very minute we came you wouldn't get anywhere with Alfred Gordon. He'll live and die amongst those trees same as his uncle did."

But Mr. Tibbs was not crestfallen.

"Did you see how sharp his face got when I said he had just two weeks more?" he asked. "I warrant you, Miss Mansfield, I'm going to hear from him before many days. In a month our saws will be felling the Gordon timber. He's holding out for more money, but he won't get it."

She knew he was wrong, but Miss Serena made no attempt to correct Mr. Tibbs. She had known the uncle and his set, self-willed ways and she saw him living once again in the nephew. Though the Ridge company moved twenty mills, the Gordon trees would remain where they were and what they were.

They had nearly reached the edge of the table land and she was reining in the mare, preparatory to the descent, when the bushes at the side of the road parted and a man stepped into the middle of the track. She heard Mr. Tibbs expel his breath gustily with surprise and she did not blame him, for the replica of the man they had left upon the veranda some minutes before now stood facing them.

He was clad in loose, worn overalls and a hickory shirt, from which his neck rose in leathern stringiness to a protuberant Adam's apple and a jutting, bony chin. High cheekbones flanked a thin and high-ridged nose that seemed like a rudder between small ears standing almost at right angles to the skull like sails. His lips were compressed to a line at once obstinate and sober. He bore a gun upon his shoulder and two small black-and-tan hounds came to grovel at his feet.

"Well, well! Have you changed your mind?" called Mr. Tibbs as Miss Serena halted the mare.

The man stared, a puzzled look flickering in the back of his pale blue eyes.

"Wait," said Miss Serena, "this must be the other brother. Howdy, Angus."

"Howdy, Miss Serena. What's this about have I changed my mind?"

"I thought you were your brother," explained Mr. Tibbs. "I've been trying to buy the timber rights of the land here, but he refuses to sell."

Angus Gordon's features showed

moderate interest and Mr. Tibbs was struck with an idea.

"Say," he began, "why don't you talk to him? He's got two weeks to make up his mind, and if you can bring him around, there'll be a nice, fat commission in it for you."

But the expression of interest had left the other's face and lines of sullenness succeeded it.

"None of my concern," he said shortly and stood aside to let them pass, "what he does with the land. The old man left it to him to worry about. Let him do it."

He turned to plunge once more into the bushes and one of the black-and-tan hounds became entangled in his legs. With an oath he lifted a heavy boot to the dog, and Miss Serena and Mr. Tibbs drove on with the agonizing yelp of the animal in their ears. Mr. Tibbs's mouth was set with distaste.

"A crossgrained pair," he judged, "and that one dirt mean and cruel, too. But mark my word, Miss Mansfield, I'll have those trees yet."

OUTSIDE the door of Miss Serena's store, Tranquil Summit simmered in the midafternoon heat of a Missouri summer. Inside, Miss Serena herself simmered, trying to solve the problem of whether to order twice as much peanut butter as usual or only half as much.

She had never been able to understand why everyone always wanted to eat the same thing at the same time and then, just as suddenly, would have none of it.

Everyone had been buying peanut butter, jar upon jar of it, for the last two weeks. Now that she was out, demand recognized no bounds, but she knew from experience that the minute she ordered a new supply everyone would forget that such a commodity as peanut butter existed.

As she chewed the end of her pencil, the door opened and a shadow fell athwart the order blank she was making out. Looking up, she found the face of a Gordon watching her.

"Howdy, A——" she began and then stopped. "Now which in the world one of you are you? Are you yourself or your brother?" she asked, smiling.

The Gordon answered her with a crooked grin.

"I'm myself," he said. "I'm Angus."

"Then howdy, Angus," Miss Serena told him, looking him up and down. "My, but aren't you togged out fit for Sunday! But those dusty boots don't set well with those clothes. Looks as though the old bay broke down and you had to walk in."

The countenance of the man before the counter dropped into ill humor.

"Nothing the matter with the bay. I'm going up to St. Louis, but do you think Alfred would drive me to town? Not he. And me with a heavy grip-sack to lug all the way."

"Be gone very long?" Miss Serena wanted to know.

"Very long, you ask?" Angus Gordon answered, his thin lips curving with sullen satisfaction. "Forever or longer. That's how long."

"Do you mean, Angus Gordon," Miss Serena questioned, astounded, "you're leaving your brother?"

"And why not, I'd like to know. He with everything, me with nothing. No reason why I should slave and pinch and skimp up in the woods to keep his property going. And when I told him, he said if I went I'd have to walk. Well, I walked and I'm catching the evening train to St. Louis, and maybe farther."

"I'm sorry to see you go, Angus," she said. "But it'll make it a sight easier for me anyway. Now I'll at least be able to tell which one of you I'm talking to."

Privately it seemed to her almost

blasphemous to separate two beings whose resemblance so plainly manifested the marvelous ingenuity of God's creative power, but she held her peace.

"Is there anything I can do for you, before you go?" she asked.

"Yes'm, there is. I suppose I'd better take me along a couple of ham sandwiches to eat on the train. And I'll take a pack of cigarettes, too. You know my brand, Miss Serena."

She handed the cigarettes to him from behind the cigar case and went on back to fix the sandwiches.

"Mustard or pickle?" she called from the interior of the big ice-box.

THERE was no answer and she came out into the aisle of the store to ask again. She found Angus Gordon leaning against the front door, his hand upon the knob, his back turned toward her.

"I said, mustard or pickle, Angus," she told him. "Which do you want on your meat?"

"I didn't hear you," he said, startled. "Don't matter. Slather some mustard on, I reckon."

When the sandwiches were ready, Miss Serena wrapped them neatly in some waxed paper and gave them to him with another of her warming smiles.

"I don't want a penny for them, Angus," she said, pushing back the silver he had thrown upon the counter. "You take 'em right along and when you eat 'em, just remember there's one person wishing you luck."

"I'll need it," he told her harshly and seemed to hesitate before he grasped her outstretched hand awkwardly.

"Poor fellow," she thought as he turned and left her. "Perhaps he ain't so likable a kind of boy, but it wasn't right fair for his brother to get all and him nothing. Now, what on earth'll I do about that peanut butter?"

THE folk of the Ozark region, like most of the people who abide some distance from the centers of urban culture, are Fundamentalists, not alone in their religion, but in their worldly affairs.

In other words, the illuminated truths of the Scriptures are little more inspired, in their belief, than the copybook maxims, which formed the backbone of their education long before sciences were taught in the little red schoolhouse, and which still descend from the blackboards of one generation to those of the next.

One of their peculiar characteristics is a firm faith in that proverb, "Honesty is the best policy."

In fact, until this particular morning in late July, Tranquil Summit had never known a clear-cut case of "breaking and entering" with the crime, thrown in for good measure, of "feloniously carrying away certain goods, chattels and personal property."

Now, however, such a blot was upon Tranquil Summit's hitherto stainless shield.

Even Miss Serena, fortified in her faith in human-kind by nearly fifty years of pleasant communion with her fellow residents, could not deny this, particularly since the events spoken of had transpired in her own store.

She discovered it when she went down early in the morning to open up. Her first intimation of the unusual was the fact that the front door stood ajar. She observed this from a distance, but even then she did not suspect a burglary, since Julius might have forgotten to lock it the night before when he closed the store.

It wouldn't have been the first time that had happened and she was al-

ready planning what she would tell him the minute he showed up.

As soon, however, as she stepped under the awning, she saw that, whatever else Julius might have been delinquent in, he was not to blame for this open door. The glass was broken at the lower inside corner of the pane and the bolt of the lock had been thrown back by some hand that had pushed through the breach and reached down to the catch.

There was no doubt of it any longer: Tranquil Summit had been the scene of a robbery.

This being her first experience of the sort, Miss Serena did not quite know what to do.

Finally she came to the decision that whoever had broken that pane of glass had not remained in the vicinity until daylight, and accordingly she thrust her head cautiously into the store. It faced her, chill and quiet in the gray light of the dawn, absolutely empty of life.

Reassured, she stepped within and found that everything seemed to be much as she had left it the night before. She did not investigate further, but retired and relocked the door, setting off for the home of Henry Downey, Tranquil Summit's representative of the law.

For the first time in the tenure of his office as marshal Henry Downey would have an opportunity to justify the trust the community had vested in him.

He was not awake when Miss Serena arrived before his door. But his slumbers did not endure long in the face of her energetic pounding. Presently, he thrust his tousled head from a second-story window and listened sleepily at first. He became wide awake at the word, "robbery."

"Be calm, now, Miss Serena," he told her, with a nervous flutter in his own voice. "I'll be right down."

"Of course I'll be calm," said Miss Serena with dignity. "What's there to be excited about now, I'd like to know."

Over at the store once more, Miss Serena made an estimate of her loss, while Downey leaned against the counter and twiddled his fingers. It was hard to say exactly what was gone.

"Let's see," she deliberated; "I had two dozen cans of early June peas and there's six of them gone. Tomatoes and corn mussed up so they must've taken some cans of those. Only two sides of bacon left means they got away with three of them. And just look at that cigar case!"

Downey merely looked, but Miss Serena put her hands upon the glass top of it and gasped when she saw its comparative bareness. The cigars were still there, thrown in a heap in a corner, but the cartons of cigarettes had all been stripped of their contents.

"Heavens alive!" said she. "Now, what would you say to that, Henry? Looks just like a passel of high school boys had been in here; but I know none of the youngsters round town would do a thing like this."

"I'd say," Downey pronounced cautiously, reaching into the candy case and absent-mindedly abstracting a chocolate cream, "it might and it mightn't have been boys. Most likely 'twas tramps. Some been seen in this country lately. How about your cash, Miss Serena?"

"Gracious, I never thought of that!"

NEITHER the safe nor the cash-drawer had been disturbed, however, and she sighed a sigh of relief. Turning from the safe, though, her eye caught the white of a cigarette stub on the floor near the door.

That was not right, because Julius swept the store clean each night before he locked up. Therefore the bur-

glar had dropped this half-burned cigarette and had stepped upon its coal.

She went over and picked the remnant up, finding that it bore the brand of a cheap cigarette.

"There's your clue," she said, handing it over to Downey, who had watched her with interest. "Now, Henry, all you've got to do is find the man that smoked that."

Henry Downey was despondent.

"I reckon," he delivered as his opinion, "that nine out of every ten loafers in the world smoke that kind. It's almost as good as if I knew the fellow's name was Smith."

And there, for the time being, the Tranquil Summit robbery rested.

MR. TIBBS, upon his second coming to Tranquil Summit, was in more of a hurry than he had been the first time.

The branch line from the railroad junction in the lower hills boasted but one train a day each way and the down train had been a matter of two hours late.

That meant, Mr. Tibbs learned, that he would have but three hours to transact his business, if he wished to catch the returning train.

Accordingly, he entered Miss Serena's store in much haste and stood restlessly by, while she served a customer who had a hard time deciding between six yards of pink calico and a like amount of blue. At length the sale was made, and Miss Serena turned to him.

"If it isn't Mr. Tibbs!" she said. "Howdy, Mr. Tibbs! Down for another try at the Gordon place?"

Mr. Tibbs smiled all over at this.

"Not for a try this time, ma'am," he told her. "This time I've got it. Didn't I tell you young Alfred Gordon would change his mind when he knew he had only two weeks in which to dicker? Here it's only ten days since I talked to him and he's come through."

"You don't mean Alfred Gordon's going to let you lumber his land?" asked Miss Serena incredulously.

"Just that. I got a letter from him yesterday, telling me to bring down the money and a contract all fixed for him to sign, and he'd turn the place over right away."

Miss Serena was completely surprised, frankly puzzled.

"Why, I can hardly believe it," she murmured, gazing at Mr. Tibbs with troubled eyes. "It's the most unlikely thing I ever knew a Gordon to do, going back on his given word like that. It's downright unnatural."

"If accepting $75,000 cash is unnatural," he commented, "there's a sight of people in this world are unnatural. But, that aside, Miss Mansfield, I'll have to hurry to finish this up and catch the afternoon train. Can you scare me up a notary?"

"No difficulty there," she assured him. "I'm a notary myself. Gracious, this is the surprisingest thing I ever heard of! I don't like it at all."

She went to the back of the store to get her bonnet, and Mr. Tibbs heard her saying, as though to herself, "Now, I wonder. Could a thing like that be?"

She paused a long time before she took the bonnet from the hook, and Mr. Tibbs grew impatient. Finally, she turned and came back to him.

"I don't like this, Mr. Tibbs," she announced. "I have a misgiving, a terrible misgiving. I'll give you my services only if you'll let me bring two witnesses up with us."

"I can't see what you're aiming at, ma'am," he answered. "It's the man's property, and he can sell if he wants to, can't he? If you're thinking about his being unfair to his uncle's last wishes, why, I'd say his uncle's last wishes were unfair to him. But if it's witnesses you want, bring them along.

They won't do any good, but no harm, either."

"And one other thing," Miss Serena pressed him.

"Something else?" asked Mr. Tibbs, losing his urbanity for the first time. "All right. What is it?"

"I want you to go up there and offer Alfred Gordon a third less than you agreed to pay him at first. I don't care what you end up paying, but until you get the word from me, I want you to stick to this lower price and bargain with him until the dicker's the only thing he's got on his mind. Will you do this, Mr. Tibbs? I guarantee you won't lose by it."

"Why, that, ma'am," said Mr. Tibbs with great relief, "is just what I was going to do anyway."

"Then that's settled," she replied. "Now, I'll get the witnesses and we'll get started. Would you mind watching the store while Julius hitches up?"

Before she left, however, Miss Serena went behind the counter and, reaching into a showcase, put something in her pocket. Mr. Tibbs noted what she had done and wondered, rather amusedly, if it could be possible that Miss Serena smoked.

She was absent quite some time and Mr. Tibbs glanced at his watch from moment to moment with considerable displeasure.

At this rate, he would never make his train, particularly since Miss Serena wanted him to do some lengthy bargaining. The boy had brought the mare around to the front, hitched to a roomy surrey, several minutes before she did come back, and Mr. Tibbs suggested they get under way without delay.

"And," he continued, noting that she was alone, "where are the witnesses?"

"Don't you worry," Miss Serena promised, "I've got them. It's Henry and Mattie Downey and Mattie said she just wouldn't go any place unless her hair was done up. We'll pick them up as we go."

Henry Downey was waiting for them at the gate to his small cottage around the corner. He hitched up his suspenders and acknowledged the introduction to Mr. Tibbs cordially.

"Mighty glad to know you, mister," he said. "Expect I'll see you right often if your company buys here. Reckon Miss Serena told you I'm marshal here an' anything I can do for you I'll be right happy to do it. Hey, Mattie! We're waitin' for you here."

His wife, a small woman with an uncertain smile, joined them and bobbed her head uncertainly to them all.

"Easy now, honey," the marshal cautioned her, helping her over the wheel into the back seat. "Take care of your dress on that wheel. You know, Miss Serena," he continued, depositing his bulk beside his wife, "I ain't quite easy in my mind about this. I never touched one of the things in my life. I swear, I don't know how I'm goin' to begin this time of life. What in thunderation you want me to do it for, anyway, I don't know."

Mr. Tibbs listened curiously, but gained nothing from Miss Serena's reply.

"Never you mind, Henry," she said and clucked to the mare, "why you have to do it. You just do it and leave the rest to me."

AGAIN Mr. Tibbs came up to the Gordon manse and, though he came this time in triumph, the house seemed more than ever gloomy and sinister in the shade of its encompassing grove. The noise of their wheels upon the rocks had foretold their advent and Alfred Gordon stood upon the veranda to greet them.

Though he made an effort to meet Miss Serena and the lumberman hospitably, his manner was strained and he glanced at Henry Downey and his wife questioningly.

"Howdy, Alfred," said Miss Serena easily, clambering out of the surrey after Mr. Tibbs. "Mr. Tibbs tells me you're going to let the old place go to him after all. It's a pity, I think, after all the years your uncle held on with something else in mind."

"Maybe so, Miss Mansfield," Alfred defended himself with a shake of his head. "Perhaps if Angus had stayed with me I might have made a go of it, but it's too big for one man to handle."

Miss Serena forebore to point out that his uncle, old as he had been, had handled the place alone. Noticing his prolonged stare at the couple who by now got out of the rear seat of the surrey, she said:

"Witnesses for the deed, Alfred. It's Henry Downey and his wife from the village."

"All right," he commented with evident relief. "Now, let's go and get this over with."

His relief seemed to be strangely out of proportion to its cause, Miss Serena thought as she followed him through the door and into a dark hallway. It gave her further food for reflection.

He led them to a cool, musty parlor that had the smell of a cave, long sealed. Gordon's ancestors, depicted severally in oil and crayon, stared gloomily at them from the walls and Alfred twisted his head down as though he could not bear their gaze upon this, his betrayal of the family word. He took a seat before the sombre mahogany center table that bore upon its age-checkered top a family Bible.

"Now, then," he said brusquely, when all had drawn their chairs in a circle about the table, "have you the contract, Mr. Tibbs? And have you the check?"

Mr. Tibbs, thus besought, brought from his inside pocket a black notecase, which he opened carefully.

"There," he said, spreading flat a legal document, its spaces for the most part filled in. "There is the contract, Mr. Gordon, all ready to sign. We've had cruisers in here estimating in the last year and we know to the foot the timber here. I have a check, too, but I doubt if it's the check you speak of."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the other, starting.

"I mean," explained Mr. Tibbs smoothly, "that by not accepting our offer ten days ago you lost $25,000 Our price has gone down that much since then."

Miss Serena watched Alfred narrowly and saw choleric red flood his cheeks and shock widen his eyes.

"But," he at last protested shrilly, "this is robbery! You made the bargain and I demand you stick to it."

"That was a bargain for that day," Mr. Tibbs said implacably. "And this is another day."

Across the table-top the squabble grew warm, became bitter in the moments that followed and at length Alfred Gordon dropped his forehead upon a shaking palm and was silent. Then it was that Henry Downey, wordless until this time, spoke up.

"Gentlemen," he suggested, pulling from his pocket a package of cigarettes and lighting one of them awkwardly, "why don't you compromise? Neither of you is gettin' anywhere in this argument. Why don't you split the difference and let's get out of here."

Alfred Gordon looked up with new hope in his eyes, as Henry Downey tossed the cigarettes to him.

"That I might do," he agreed and he turned to Mr. Tibbs, the while

pulling a cigarette free from its fellows, tapping it upon his nail, lifting it to his mouth.

He leaned forward to catch the light Henry Downey was holding for him. In that same instant he knew he had trapped himself.

For Miss Serena rose from her chair, rose like an avenging spirit, as stern and wrathful as some dread angel upon the Judgment Day.

"Angus Gordon," she cried in a terrible voice, "Angus Gordon, what have you done with your brother?"

Before the flaming truth that shone in her eyes, the man tried unavailingly to stand.

"I am Alfred Gordon," he said, but his voice had become a thin and broken pipe.

The cigarette fell to the floor unnoticed and suddenly, shudderingly, he covered his face with his hands.

"I swear to God, I didn't go to do it," came through those sweaty, weaving fingers. "I only meant to tie him up, until I could get the money. But he was in the barn and heard me come in the dark. He had a gun and I got it from him. He's still down in the barn. I couldn't touch him yet. Take me away from here, will you? Oh, God!"

With Angus Gordon between them, Henry Downey and Mr. Tibbs verified the last part of that tale.

MISS SERENA, Mattie Downey and Mr. Tibbs, in the survey, preceded Henry Downey, who was conveying his prisoner in Alfred's farm wagon behind Alfred's bay. Miss Serena's face was drawn and she did not immediately answer the respectful query Mr. Tibbs put to her.

"The greed of men!" she sighed at length. "I knew, Mr. Tibbs, the minute you told me Alfred was going to sell, that Angus had come back and had robbed my store that night to get his cigarettes. I knew right away something was mortally wrong.

"So I had Henry Downey put up that scheme to see if it was Angus or Alfred there. Heaven knows what I'd have done if it failed, because I was sure as sure it was Angus. Now, I suppose, you'll still be after the trees?"

"That I don't know," said Mr. Tibbs doubtfully. "That I can't say, but certainly not right away."

His fingers, searching his coat pocket, came upon the package of cigarettes he had picked up from the centre table, the cigarettes that had cost Angus Gordon so much.

"What was it the will said about the trees?" he asked.

"The part," replied Miss Serena, "that said the man who gave the trees to be destroyed would nourish within himself the seeds of his own destruction?"

"Hm," he muttered, half to himself, his fingers closing upon the cigarettes, "the seeds of his own destruction."

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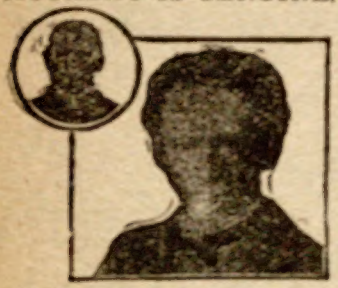

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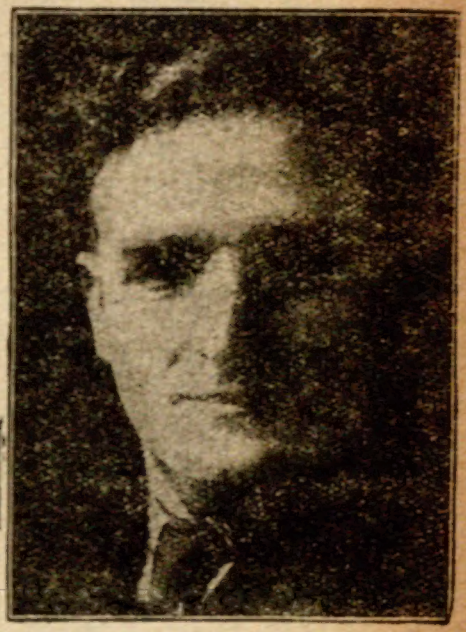

From Photo of M. C. MacDowell

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From Photo of Frances Lonsdale

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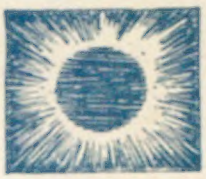

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